A

KEY TO MEDITATION

OR

Simple Methods of Mental Prayer, etc.

BASED ON THE

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES OF SAINT IGNATIUS

FOLLOWED BY INSTRUCTIONS DESIGNED TO BRING HELP AND CONSOLATION TO SOULS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES IN THEIR INTERCOURSE WITH GOD AND DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

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PREFACE

Pious souls are often heard to lament their ignorance of the way to meditate, to pray, or to make an examination of conscience. They stand in need of instruction alike as to the means of lessening the difficulties presented by these exercises and of rendering them fruitful. To such souls the following methods are offered. Let them read and practise them assiduously, and those obstacles which daunt their hearts will soon be overcome.

We append, in addition, a method for making one day's retreat in each month. Souls aspiring to perfection will cling to a pious practice vouched for by the example of the Saints, the utility of which has been amply demonstrated by experience.

Preface

That this little work may conduce to the glory of God and to the advancement of His kingdom in the hearts of men we devoutly hope and pray.

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SIMPLE METHODS OF MENTAL PRAYER

GENERAL ADVICE SUITED TO THE VARYING METHODS OF MENTAL PRAYER

I. Remote Preparation.—Be careful to bring to your meditation that preparation of the heart and mind which springs from habitual recollection. To this end shun, as far as possible, all sources of distraction, for the soul which fails to be on her guard against these will never attain to mental prayer.

II. Over-Night Preparation.—Make this before going to rest. Read over the subject you propose to take the following morning, and dwell on it for awhile before you sleep, reverting to it anew on waking, and making it your aim to banish all irrelevant thoughts.

III. IMMEDIATE PREPARATION.—This must not be omitted. It consists in—

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God with the endeavour to realize it most profoundly.

2. Offering Him every faculty of our soul—our memory, imagination, understanding, and will—beseeching Him to enable us to concentrate them wholly upon the subject we are about to consider.

3. If our meditation be concerned with some definite mystery, such as the birth of our Saviour, we should seek to picture the scene to ourselves, seeing with the eyes of our mind the stable at Bethlehem and the manger. If, on the other hand, we are about to occupy our thoughts with some abstract truth, such as the misery consequent upon sin, we may find it helpful to conceive of the soul as imprisoned within the body, an exile amid carnal surroundings in this vale of tears. This picturing to our minds is what is termed the *First Prelude*, or *Composition of Place*. It aims at stimulating and concentrating the powers of the imagina-

tion by producing precisely that effect upon the soul which would result from contemplating a faithful picture of the scene, or, better still, from beholding the actual mystery itself before our eyes. The prelude should be brief, involving no strain or mental effort on our part. Should it prove a source of real difficulty, it is wiser to omit it altogether.

4. Asking from God the grace needed for that particular meditation—grace, that is, to understand its lessons, and to put them into practice in our daily lives. This petition is termed the *Second Prelude.*

IV. We should apply ourselves during meditation to the point or points to which God's grace seems to draw us in a special manner, without constraining ourselves to pass on further. The gleaner lingers in the one field where the ears of corn still lie thickly, and sees no need to go elsewhere. Our aim must be to understand fully rather than to think much, so that the truth we are meditating may be savoured inwardly in our hearts.

V. If a book of detailed meditations is

used, be careful not to read too much at a time, but pause for reflection, whether over some phrase, or at the close of a paragraph or some special point. If this rule is disregarded, what was intended to be a meditation will end as mere reading.

VI. Do not allow yourself to turn capriciously from one subject to another, but follow out the scheme of the book selected. To do otherwise is to open the door to vain curiosity and to instability and dissipation of mind. When the entire book has been gone through in this way it may be begun afresh, or another may be chosen in its place.

PRAYER OF SAINT IGNATIUS, WHICH MAY BE USED AS A COLLOQUY AT THE CLOSE OF MEDITATION.

Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty; my memory, my understanding, and all my will. All that I have and possess Thou hast given me; Thine it is, and to Thee I restore it. Do with me as Thou wilt; give me only the love of Thee and Thy grace, and I am rich enough, and ask for nothing more.

FIRST METHOD OF MENTAL PRAYER

MEDITATION PROPERLY SO CALLED

NOTA.—It is here assumed that the *Remote*, *Over-Night*, and *Immediate Preparation* has been duly made, as explained above.

MEDITATION consists in applying the three faculties of the soul to certain holy considerations, in order that our hearts may be directed to God, and that they may be sanctified thereby. It is, consequently, an exercise of the memory, the understanding, and the will.

EXERCISE OF THE MEMORY.

A brief and comprehensive review of the subject prepared is undertaken, as though we were about to narrate it to some one else.

This is followed by the careful consideration of the first point, after which it is often well to make an act of faith based on the particular mystery or truth under consideration. Memory is called into play at various stages of the meditation, whenever it becomes necessary to recall certain circumstances or something bearing on our subject which may furnish us with fresh matter for thought and holy desires.

Exercise of the Understanding.

This implies reflection and personal application.

I. Reflection leads us to see what bearing the particular truth or mystery ought to have upon our belief and actions. It reveals to us the utility, vital importance, reasonableness, and spiritual resources which lie enfolded within it, and rouses us to the appreciation of the loss we should sustain if we disregarded it. We may think of ourselves as about to give advice on the matter to our best friend, or we may turn our thoughts

to the approach of death, seeking to realize now what we shall then desire to have been and done. We pass on in the next place to consider certain inducements or necessary consequences which make a direct appeal to our hearts, in just the same way as though we were seeking to lead others towards the practice of these holy lessons in their daily lives.

II. The application falls under the two headings of " general " and " particular."

1. The general application directs our thoughts to the influence exerted by this truth over the conduct of the majority of men, and to our own judgment concerning that conduct. If we find that we ourselves participate in their blindness, we cannot fail to extend our condemnation to our own actions. We must be careful not to dwell too long on this point or to suffer distractions to creep in.

2. The particular application teaches us to examine closely what heed we have paid to a truth which stands in such vital relation to our soul's welfare, and whether our con-

duct be habitually influenced by it or not. In this latter case we note in what way we have been negligent, and the wrong we have thereby done our souls; whence our neglect has arisen, and the chief causes of it, comparing our own slackness with the ardour displayed by worldly men in the acquisition of riches and honour, and seeking to make clear to ourselves what we must do or avoid doing in the future.

Exercise of the Will.

The will, which commonly responds to the stimulus of convictions arrived at by the understanding and gives practical effect to them, is the source of diverse acts during meditation which are at once the latter's noblest and most indispensable fruit.

I. Our will stirs up holy desires arising out of the subject of our meditation, and conditioned by the general and actual dispositions of the soul and by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. The affections thus commonly induced are—(1) sorrow and shame;

(2) humility; (3) adoring wonder; (4) gratitude; (5) mistrust of self; (6) patience; (7) resignation of ourselves into God's hands, whether for action, privation, or suffering; (8) trust in the Divine goodness and in the merits of Jesus Christ; (9) oblation of one's entire self; (10) the sacrifice of anything which hinders or retards our progress in holy virtue; (11) preparation for meeting trials we know to be impending; (12) zeal; (13) love; (14) conformity to the will of God; (15) abandonment of ourselves to Divine Providence. Of all these affections those specially evoked by the subject of our meditation will suffice for the need of the moment.

II. The will engenders resolutions based on reasonable grounds. It is advisable to make—(1) a general resolution; (2) one or two particular resolutions, applying the general resolution to the actual needs of the soul at the moment; (3) a third and more practical resolution may be added, having reference to the means whereby the particular resolution may be rendered fruitful, especially during the coming day.

III. The will further gives rise to what is known in meditation as "colloquy." It is open to us to make one or more of these, according as we may be led, especially towards the close of our meditation. Colloquy implies a reverent and familiar conversing with God, in which we praise and thank Him, offering ourselves to Him, and asking Him for the graces we need. Now it is as a son that one draws near to Him, now as a servant, now, again, as a sick soul to its Healer. We may address ourselves in the same way to Jesus Christ, to the Blessed Virgin, or to some one of the Saints, closing our meditation with a *Pater noster* and *Ave*.

Recollection after Meditation.

We must—(1) examine briefly what has been the nature of our meditation; that is, whether it has been well or ill-made. If the latter, we must seek to trace the cause of our failure. The interior lights received should be recalled to our minds, together with the impressions wrought by Divine

grace in our heart and the resolutions we have made.

(2) Offer these resolutions to God, asking pardon from Him, and imploring the aid of the Blessed Virgin and our patron Saints.

(3) Certain principal reflections or holy desires which have arisen in the course of our meditation may be gathered up into a *spiritual bouquet*. To this one should turn from time to time during the day, in order to revive those dispositions due to the action of Divine grace in our hearts.

Illustration of the Above Method.

Let us picture to ourselves a merchant to whom a friend brings tidings that certain goods are to be purchased in such and such a place (here we have the subject-matter of the coming meditation). Sitting down to think it over quietly, and, so to speak, conceiving a mental image of the circumstances as they present themselves to him (over-night preparation and preludes), he recapitulates to himself that these particular wares are for

sale in a given town, and at such and such a price, etc. (here comes in memory). He then reflects on the various uses he might make of them, on the reasons which tell in favour of a purchase, the profitable nature of the transaction, and the wealth that will surely accrue (exercise of the understanding). He recognizes how many others have already taken advantage of this good opportunity, and how great has been their gain, so that he cannot but acknowledge that they acted wisely (general application). He sees it is his own fault if he has failed to discern and make use of the opportunity sooner, since he does not lack the needed capital, or could at least have procured it. He estimates the loss in which his negligence has involved him, and plans how to make it good, how to overcome any difficulties in the way, and what form his action should now take (particular application). He reproaches himself with his negligence, and repents of it, determining to repair it forthwith, and resolving to expend so much money in the purchase of a given amount of merchandise in some definite

way which appeals to him as wisest (here we have the kindling of the affections and the registering of the general and particular resolutions). He confides his plans to his patron or friend (the colloquy), and finally he may see fit to review the whole matter briefly, that he may judge whether all its bearings have been carefully considered, and that he may reaffirm his resolutions (here we have recollection).

If in place of this traffic in merchandise you substitute some essential truth or the consideration of some mystery or holy virtue, following out the same method, and entreating God to enlighten you by His grace, you will not fail to make a good meditation.

The above example proves to us that no one is either unable to meditate nor really ignorant of the way, for the method proposed is congenial to the natural process which the human mind instinctively follows, and is therefore simpler than many represent it to themselves to be.

Second Example of this Method.

Meditation on Death.

Preparatory Prayer.—In this prayer we ask God that everything within us may tend purely and entirely to His honour and glory.

First Prelude.—Place yourself in imagination beside some death-bed, or standing in the midst of a cemetery, or at the edge of an open grave.

Second Prelude.—Ask God to impart to you a salutary dread of death and the grace to make daily preparation for it.

First Point.—Begin by recalling to memory all that proves to us the certainty of death: (1) Our mortal nature; (2) God's judgment on our first parents; (3) our own sins; (4) the daily experience of life, etc. The understanding will find food for reflection in each of these points, and it should be our aim specially to stir up within us such affections as may rightly be expected to arise from their consideration.

Second Point.—Remember that nothing is

more uncertain than the hour of death. At what age, in what place, on what day, at what hour, at what occupation, and in what dispositions will it surprise you? These reflections should bear fruit in the exercise of the will.

Third Point.—Let your thoughts dwell upon all that the body must pass through, whether before or after death: (1) Sharp, piercing pains, annulling the power of thought, and often terribly prolonged. (2) The dulling of all earthly sounds. (3) Dread of the tomb; separation from whatever we have possessed or loved . . . all about us corruption. (4) Reason with your soul concerning these points, seeking by means of them to influence the will.

Fourth Point.—Think of the terrors experienced by a soul at the moment of death. . . . Am I worthy of love or of hatred? Have I true contrition for my sins, which are so numerous and perhaps so heinous? At this hour, it may be, a host of hitherto unsuspected sins reveals itself. . . . Faults one had judged to be but light appear as

grievous transgressions. . . . Add to this the temptations of the evil one . . . the indescribable anguish sometimes experienced by a soul ignorant whether it still lives in this world or has passed hence. . . . Ponder all these things; what emotions are they capable of arousing in our hearts!

Colloquy.—Make this with your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. Gazing on Him as He hangs on the cross, about to breathe forth His last sigh, pour out to Him all that fills your heart and soul at this moment. . . . *Pater noster.*

SECOND METHOD

CONTEMPLATION

THIS method is adapted to meditations upon some mystery of the life of Jesus Christ or of the Blessed Virgin, and, in general, upon any fact of history recorded in the sacred Scriptures.

Immediate Preparation.—After seeking a profound realization of the presence of God we should—(1) Recall the broad outlines of the fact or mystery round which our meditation centres, without halting to consider details; (2) picture the setting of the scene, as, for instance, the Temple, the Cenacle, Calvary, a mountain, or the seashore; (3) ask God to give us grace corresponding to that manifested in the particular mystery, such as humility, patience, compassion, or joy, according as the meditation bears on

the Birth, Passion, Death, or Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After this brief preparation follows the meditation itself, an exercise which will prove as simple as it is fruitful. What is needful is that we should consider the persons around whom the fact or mystery centres, their actions, and their words. Let us take the Baptism of Jesus Christ as our example.

I. Who are the persons? The Eternal Father, about to proclaim the Divinity of His Son; Jesus Christ, the Son of God, coming to receive a baptism ordained for sinful men; the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove; St. John the Baptist, the preacher of penance; a crowd of sinners of every rank and age. Let us begin by asking ourselves who these persons were. First, who is the Eternal Father? Who is Jesus Christ? and so forth in regard to each.

II. What are the words they speak? St. John says to Jesus: "I ought to be baptized by Thee," and Jesus replies to him: "Suffer it to be so now, for so it becometh

us to fulfil all justice." Here we witness a contest in humility, wherein the victory remains with Jesus. We may further imagine to ourselves the diverse conversations taking place amongst the crowd which pressed so closely about the person of the holy Precursor. Finally, the voice of the Eternal Father speaks : " This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Solemn words, indeed, yielding abundant food for reflection.

III. What are their actions ? Jesus draws near, and enters the River Jordan. Note His calm spirit and His humility. For Him there was no need of this baptism. St. John takes water and pours it on His head. At the same instant the heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends, and the voice of the Eternal Father is heard speaking. Try to imagine the stir which passed through the surging crowd in the face of such a miracle.

What is the fruit this meditation yields to us ? No doubt its most obvious fruit must be humility, but should God bid us dwell on some other lesson we must follow His

leading, since the Holy Spirit breathes where He will. The meditation ends with a colloquy, the *Pater noster*, and the Recollection.

NOTA.—1. It is not intended that persons, words, and actions should be considered separately, but that, on the contrary, the meditation should closely follow the actual record of events, linking together the words and actions of each person so as to present the whole to ourselves as though we were eyewitnesses of the scene. Each circumstance of the mystery claims our consideration in turn. The distinction between persons, words, and actions relates rather to the matter than to the method of our contemplation.

2. In default of words actually uttered we may conceive of interior words or sentiments. For instance, in the mystery of the Nativity the Child Jesus utters no word, but it is open to us to reflect on the feelings of His Heart as He was laid in the manger, or received the tender care and caresses of His Mother, or, again, when the shepherds and the Magi came to offer their gifts.

3. If a single person, word, or act suffices to occupy our hearts and minds during the entire period of our contemplation, there will be no need to go further afield.

4. In the mysteries of the Passion three other points are to be considered :

IV. The sufferings which our Lord experienced or desired to experience in His humanity.

V. The veiling of His Divinity, and the freedom of action thus conceded to the cruel enemies, whom It none the less spares.

VI. What we ought to do or to suffer for the sake of a Lord Whom our sins have brought to such a pass.

5. In the mysteries of the Resurrection two further points only are added :

VII. The splendour of the Divinity which shines forth in this mystery.

VIII. The great tenderness with which our Lord comforts His disciples.

The meditation closes with one or several colloquies and the *Pater noster*.

EXAMPLE OF THIS METHOD.

Contemplation on the Life of our Lord Jesus Christ at Nazareth.

Preparatory Prayer.—As before.

First Prelude.—Our Lord Jesus Christ has been found by His parents in the Temple. Leaving Jerusalem with them, He went down to Nazareth, and was subject to Mary and Joseph. Working as the son of a carpenter, He, nevertheless, grew unceasingly in wisdom and grace before God and men.

Second Prelude.—Picture the little house at Nazareth . . . its scantness and poverty . . . above all, the workshop and the little room which Jesus called His own.

Third Prelude.—Ask for some grace suggested by the subject of your contemplation, as, for instance, a practical love of obedience, fidelity to the duties of your state in life, etc.

First Point.—Our Lord Jesus Christ's submission and obedience to His parents.

Second Point.—His growth in wisdom, age, and grace in the eyes of God and men.

Third Point.—He Himself, it would seem, laboured in the workshop, since the Jews said of Him, " Is not this the carpenter ?"

Dwell on the persons, words, and actions as they present themselves at each point, seeking to derive spiritual profit from the diverse reflections suggested. The above counsel applies to all contemplations made after this method.

Colloquy.—Let me make this in the tenderest and most loving words I can find, addressing myself in succession to Jesus, to Mary, and to Joseph . . . and asking for everything which will enable me the more perfectly to imitate my Saviour Jesus Christ. *Pater noster.*

Repetition.

This exercise, made once or several times, opens up to our minds a fuller understanding of the mystery or truth which is about to be considered afresh. Its distinguishing feature lies in the pausing for a longer or shorter period, and with redoubled earnest-

ness, over such considerations as have afforded us greater or less consolation, interior lights, etc. In an exercise of this kind the same order is observed as in meditations or contemplations already familiar to us.

THIRD METHOD

APPLICATION OF THE SENSES

The imagination endows a soul with the power to actualize a given object, and, so to speak, to see, hear, or savour it, etc. The directing of this faculty of the soul, together with the bodily senses, to some truth of religion (in such measure as the latter may be susceptible of it), or to some mystery bearing on the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, is known as the "application of the senses."

This exercise is marvellously fruitful in the increasing of devotion and of every other spiritual good. Its preparation and close resemble those in the previous methods, to which it is often added in the form of a repetition, in order to bring its lessons more deeply home to the soul.

Five points are, as a rule, proposed for

consideration, although these are at times reduced to four by treating the senses of taste and smell under one heading. The method is as follows :

First Point.—To represent to oneself the persons concerned, together with all the attendant circumstances.

Second Point.—To listen to their words or to the words one may deem them to utter.

Third Point.—To taste interiorly the sweetness, bitterness, or other conceivable feelings of the person under consideration.

Fourth Point.—To inhale, so to speak, the fragrance of virtue or the poison of vice, the sulphurous fumes of hell, the odour of putrescence, etc.

Fifth Point.—To touch interiorly those objects which may by this means yield us some spiritual fruit : the everlasting flames, or the garments of the Saviour ; to kiss the ground His feet have trod, or to press our lips to the crib.

We will illustrate this method by a consideration of the temptation of our Lord.

First Point—Sight.—Invoke before your

eyes the figure of Jesus Christ . . . the desert . . . the wild beasts . . . the Evil One . . . the angels, seeking to educe some lesson from every detail of the scene.

Second Point—Hearing.—Seem to yourself to hear our Lord speaking with His Father . . . the silence and the sounds of the desert . . . the tempter's words, and our Lord's replies . . . what those witnesses of the spectacle, the angels, are saying one to another. . . . Let all this be converted to your spiritual profit.

Third Point—Taste.—The delights of the Holy Spirit at inhabiting a heart so docile as was that of Jesus . . . the rapture of our Lord's soul in accomplishing the will of His Father . . . the joy of the desert when it welcomed Jesus Christ. . . . Seek again to enrich your own soul by means of these reflections.

Fourth Point—Smell.—Inhale the sweet odour of the obedience and self-abasement of Jesus . . . of His disregard for everything save God . . . of His triumphs over the tempter . . . of His love for silence and solitude, etc.

Fifth Point—Touch.—Follow in His footsteps. . . . Seem to yourself to touch and kiss this earth, this rock, on which He laid Himself down to rest, etc.

Colloquy, followed by recitation of the *Pater noster*.

FOURTH METHOD

OR FIRST WAY OF PRAYER

This is in the nature of an examen, with which devout desires, compunction, and resolutions of amendment are intermingled, and which is based upon the consideration, either of the Commandments, or the seven capital sins, or the powers of the soul—the memory, understanding, and will; or, again, upon the bodily senses—sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. It is made in the following way:

1. Before beginning, pause for recollection, and ask yourself, What is it I am about to do? I desire to meditate on such or such a subject.

2. Ask God's grace to see the sins you have committed, it may be, against His commandments, and promise Him that you

will be faithful in observing them in the future.

3. Make the examen, not as though in preparation for confession, but in the form of a meditation and brief statement of account between your conscience and yourself in the sight of God. Thus : "What have I to reproach myself with in respect of the First Commandment, or as regards the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, or religion generally ?" Examine your conscience for a moment or two, then ask God's pardon for your faults, and promise Him to amend. To this should be added the expression of such devout affections as may rise to the lips naturally under the circumstances ; for example : " My God, I believe ; increase my faith. My God, forgive me for failing tc trust Thee as I ought. My God, I desire to love Thee ever more and more." After self-examination on this First Commandment, pass to the Second, treating it in the same way, and so on to the end.

When the time set apart for meditation has elapsed, pause, and finish by reciting the

Pater noster. The subject can be resumed on the following day.

If in place of the Commandments our meditation is concerned with the seven capital sins, the bodily senses, or the faculties of the soul, the method is the same, only the subject-matter being changed. Thus, instead of asking yourself, "What sins have I committed against faith?" you will ask, "Have I sinned through pride, envy, etc.?" . . . or else, "Have I sinned through my eyes or my tongue?" . . . or, again, "Have I sinned by my memory or my understanding?" closing, as usual, with the *Pater noster*.

An excellent subject for meditation is to consider the use which our Lord and the Blessed Virgin habitually made of the bodily senses. What modesty of demeanour! What holy reticence! What charity in speech! How closed their ears to all save what was edifying! What temperance in their repasts! In a word, what prudent self-restraint maintained in the employment of every bodily sense! We may then ask ourselves what use we, in our turn, have made of

these same senses of ours. Have we imitated Jesus and Mary ? If we see cause to reproach ourselves, let us resolve to keep stricter watch in days to come concerning this matter.

FIFTH METHOD

OR SECOND WAY OF PRAYER

THIS is the simplest, and at the same time often the most fruitful. Some vocal prayer is chosen, such as the *Pater noster*, the Hail Mary, or the *Salve Regina*, for instance, of which each word becomes in turn the subject of meditation, the passage from one to the next being made only when mind and heart seem for the moment to have utilized to the full the spiritual nourishment contained in each. It will be found advisable to avail ourselves of such similes and comparisons as open up to us a more comprehensive view of the particular subject. Let us take the Hail Mary for our illustration of this method.

Before Kneeling Down.

What am I about to do? To meditate on the Hail Mary. O holy Virgin! obtain for me the grace to make this meditation well.

Kneeling.

Hail! Who speaks this word? The angel Gabriel. And to whom? To the Virgin Mary. It marks the reverence which the angel owed to her who was about to become his Queen by becoming the Mother of his King. What an honour for Mary! O holy Virgin! I congratulate thee on this honour which thy virtues have merited. I, too, bid thee *Hail!* as my Queen, my Mother, and the Mother of my King. It is indeed fitting that I should offer thee this token of reverence, since even an angel bows down before thee. When my lips utter the word it links me with heaven and earth, for this salutation resounds on every side.

Mary. Oh, how beautiful is the name!

So pleasing and so fraught with consolation that love echoes it everywhere. *Mary! Mary!* This sweet name means succour for the weak, consolation for the sorrowing, hope for sinners, a last refuge for the dying. *Mary!* Did every moment of my meditation but find me repeating, tasting, and savouring this name, the time would be well spent. The name of Mary signifies "Star of the Sea." Mark how she justifies this title by guiding us through the shoal-waters of life. It denotes, further, "Lady" or "Queen." Do not these titles, too, beseem her? Or, again, "one who enlightens." Is it not through her that God's light shone forth to us? O Mary! be my star, my queen, my light!

Full of grace. A vessel which is full can hold no more. Pour in a single drop, and it brims over. So it was with Mary. Her soul was full of grace, light, and understanding; her heart full of grace, love, and holy desires; her virginal body full of purity and holiness. *Full of grace.* Hence there was no void which sin might enter and fill. O immaculate

Virgin! in thee all is grace; sin has no part. *Full of grace,* from the very moment of her conception; but, later on, in requital for her faithful correspondence with God's gifts, she received that measure of which the Gospel speaks—pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

In the mystery of the Incarnation the measure of grace in Mary was illimitable, for she bore the Source of grace Himself within her. *Full of grace.* The fulness dwelt in her that the superabundance might be poured forth upon us. . . . I will go—oh, how often!—to draw from this fountain which has never ceased to pour out the living waters of Divine grace upon men.

The Lord is with thee. Since no sin has ever forced Him to depart from thee, He is with thee now, as He has always been. O my God! be with me too, always, and suffer me not to be separated from Thee.

Blessed art thou amongst women. She herself it is who tells us in the *Magnificat* that "All generations shall call me blessed." And it is true, for her sanctuaries are every-

where, and her children's love towards her devises a thousand ways in which to manifest itself. What woman has ever been honoured as is Mary, but what woman has ever merited to be so honoured ?

And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Jesus ! Divine name brought by the angel from heaven. Jesus ! Saviour of the world. Jesus ! the Son of the Most High, is also the Son of Mary, the fruit of her womb. O Blessed Virgin ! I congratulate thee in that thou art the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of thy God ! Jesus is blessed—blessed on earth and in heaven. O Jesus ! I, too, bless Thee, love Thee, and adore Thee !

This prayer may be developed in various ways, but the above outlines serve to indicate the method, which can, of course, be applied to any other prayer. Should the consideration of two or three words only occupy the entire time set apart, the rest of the prayer is recited at the close, and resumed on the following day.

SIXTH METHOD

OR THIRD WAY OF PRAYER

THIS consists in reciting a prayer very slowly, breath being taken between each several word. The method may be illustrated by its application to the prayer, "Soul of Jesus, sanctify me."

1. Pause for recollection, and ask yourself, "What is it that I am about to do?"

2. Seek for grace to profit by this exercise.

3. Begin slowly. "Soul of Christ,—sanctify me.—Body of Christ,—save me.—Blood of Christ,—inebriate me," and so on, meditating during the whole of this quiet recitation either upon the sense of the words uttered or on the dignity of Him to Whom one is speaking, or on one's own nothingness, as the Holy Spirit may direct the heart.

This method is suited to all alike, and

may be used at any time of the day, even when we are at work. It will be found specially useful by those who have contracted the bad habit of reciting their vocal prayers too rapidly. In accordance with this method several prayers may be consecutively recited, and resumed again later on, after a temporary suspension, as circumstances may dictate. Care should always be taken to close with the *Pater noster* and the Hail Mary.

SEVENTH METHOD

OR

READING UNITED TO CONSIDERATION

If, as might happen, we were to find ourselves in such mental dispositions as rendered meditation almost an impossibility, even with the aid of any of the methods set forth above, there is yet another open to us, which can be used at all times, and which, although in itself far easier, offers to a great extent the same advantages. This is an exercise termed "consideration," and which lies midway, so to speak, between reading and meditation. Take one of those books of piety which clothe for us in few words such a body of deep teaching, as, for instance, "The Imitation," "The Spiritual Combat," "The Retreat" of P. Croisset, "The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ,"

by St. Alphonso de Liguori ; " The Foundations of the Spiritual Life," by P. Surin ; or other small works of a similar nature which your director may advise as suited to your individual need. After pausing to place yourself in the presence of God and to implore His aid in enabling you to profit by this exercise, read with close attention a few lines of the book chosen. This should not be exchanged for another on any light pretext, neither should it be dipped into at random, but the due sequence observed. As soon as a thought arrests attention by responding to the needs of your soul, and offering help in the form of light, counsel, admonition, or rebuke, pause over it, pondering it well, and giving it time to find its way deep into your heart, and to make a salutary and enduring impression there. If the imagination plays truant, bring it gently back again to the same thought, reading and re-reading the passage as often as may be necessary, being careful to draw from it all the spiritual nourishment with which it is charged for you, that you may apply it to your own heart

and life. When this has been faithfully done, the reading should be resumed until some further helpful thought strikes you, which is to be considered in the same way, and so on during the entire time allotted to this exercise. By this method you may read but little, it is true, and that little in very irregular fashion, a single page sufficing at times, whilst at others many are needed, but the spiritual gain will be great, and that is far more to be desired than much reading. What would even the best books profit you, however constantly read, if the necessary reflection were lacking? However copious a fountain may be, he who thinks to draw water from it in a sieve will get but a few drops for his pains. Read slowly, therefore, and give yourself time to digest this spiritual fare, for as bodily nourishment, too quickly taken, fails to effect the good looked for, so it is with the food of our souls.

This method of consideration is akin to the fifth method described above. For the words of any given prayer it substitutes those of a book, upon which our eyes light, and

which serve both to stimulate thought and to restrain the random wanderings of the imagination. It is impossible to commend it too strongly to those who complain of sterility and distractions in mental prayer. St. Teresa tells us that she employed it for a long period with abundant fruit, finding herself unable for many years to meditate in any other way.

METHOD OF MAKING A GENERAL EXAMEN

In this method five points are included—thanksgiving to God for His mercies, a petition for light, examination of conscience, considerations suited to evoke contrition, and a firm resolution for the future.

1. *Thanksgiving.*—After placing ourselves in the presence of God, His benefits should be recalled, in order that we may contrast them with our own ingratitude—a comparison fitted, indeed, to cover us with confusion. Thanks should be rendered as well for general as for particular benefits—for the temporal and spiritual ones, for the known and unknown, and especially for those which that very day has brought us—all this briefly, but with great fervour.

2. *Petition for Light*—that is, the grace to know our faults and to abhor them. The heart is an unfathomable abyss, over

which our self-love throws a veil of thick darkness, ever flattering, extenuating, pleading for delay. Without the Divine illumination we can never learn to know ourselves as we are ; hence we need to ask for it with importunity.

3. *Examination of Conscience.*—This may be carried out either by searching our thoughts, words, and actions, in order to see whether God, our neighbour, or we ourselves, have just ground for contentment, or by recalling to mind every action and exercise of the day since our last examen, and noting carefully in what way we have sinned, whether exteriorly or by impure motives or intention. Three or four minutes should ordinarily suffice for this.

4. *Stirring of the Heart to Contrition.*—This and the following point are the most important, and call, therefore, for earnest solicitude on our part. It is often well to reproduce before the eyes of the mind some actual and striking scene, such as the tenderly reproachful look bestowed on St. Peter by our Lord after the denial, or St. Mary

Magdalen at the feet of Jesus in the Pharisee's house, or the humble publican at the door of the Temple. It is also helpful at this moment to contemplate the crucifix, or anything which serves to image to our minds the sufferings of Jesus Christ or the Blessed Virgin—such as the Garden of Olives, the scourging, one of the Stations of the Cross, or Our Lady of Dolours—or, again, to dwell on some thought calculated to stir our heart to true sorrow. Every such practice is good in itself, and it is best to follow the individual bent in this matter. A fervent act of contrition should then be made, many finding it helpful to do this vocally.

5. *Resolution for the Future.*—At this point we may make use of any comparison calculated to aid in evoking pious dispositions in the soul. Thus, for instance, we may conceive of the case of a man condemned to death for the crime of *lèse-majesté*, and thereafter freely pardoned by his King. Will he not bring him loyal service thenceforward? Or, again, a pilot, who has barely escaped shipwreck owing to his foolhardiness. Will

he not act more prudently in future? So we, in our turn, must promise God that, given the succour of His grace, we will refrain from sin, and, taking account beforehand of possible occasions of falling between the present moment and our next examen, we must implore Him to sustain us by His power, and invoke the aid of the Blessed Virgin and our guardian angel, as devotion may prompt. The exercise should close by the devout recitation of the *Pater noster* and Hail Mary.

We will now proceed to give an illustration of this method by means of a practical example.

BEFORE KNEELING, SAY—

My God, give me to know Thee and to know myself (St. Augustine). Grant me grace to make this examen well.

KNEELING.

1. *Thanksgiving.*—I thank Thee, O my God, for all Thy benefits. Thou hast created

me, and preservest me in life by Thy mercy. To me Thou hast given that gift of faith which is lacking to so many, and having revealed to me the way of virtue by the light of Thy Gospel, Thou constrainest me, by Thy holy grace, to walk in that way. (Here recall some special blessing.) This very day have I not received a great mercy at Thy hand? (For example, Confession, Mass, Holy Communion, some word from God, a holy inspiration, a good example.) O my God, how clearly I see that Thou willest my salvation, my perfection, and how unceasingly do I desire to render Thee thanks for this Thy goodness!

2. *Petition for the Light of the Holy Spirit.*— Add, O Lord, to all Thy mercies by illuminating my soul with Thy Divine light, that I may know all my faults, and especially those which displease Thee most in me. O Divine Sun of Justice! dispel the darkness which fills my heart and mind by reason of mental distractions, terrestrial affections, and the love of self. Teach me to realize how many and how great are the wounds I have sus-

tained from the enemy, so that I may seek to apply the remedy whilst they may still be healed.

3. *Examen.*—How have I performed each action of this day?

Morning: Rising, prayer, meditation, Mass, breakfast, conversation, work, etc.

Afternoon: Dinner, recreation, visits made or received, work, reading, prayer, etc.

In all these things have I kept my soul clear of offence against God and my neighbour? Have I not come short in regard to some particular virtue?

4. *Contrition.*—O my God, how should I not be utterly confounded when I compare Thy mercies with my ingratitude, Thy love with my indifference, Thy tender invitations with my endless delays? I have wounded Thy heart, I know well, and the knowledge fills me with grief and shame. Accept, O Lord, the sincere repentance of a contrite and humbled heart. Give but a fountain of tears to my eyes, and I will weep day and night over my offences against Thee. Give me St. Peter's penitence, St. Mary Mag-

dalen's tears, and the publican's humility, since I am guilty as they. Look upon Jesus Christ Thy Son, Who became a sacrifice of propitiation for me. Behold his feet and His hands, which the nails pierced; His brow encircled by the thorns; His heart bared by the soldier's lance—all these wounds of His unite to bespeak Thy forgiveness on my behalf. That forgiveness, O my God, Thou wilt surely accord to me who kneel before Thee pleading for it, since Thou hast said, "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from His way and live."

5. *Resolution.*—Henceforward, O my God, I will offend Thee no more. All the approaches of my soul shall be closed against sin. I will flee from all that occasions it, and even, if it may be, from the very thought of it. Up to this present, it is true, I have been so unfaithful to my resolutions that I scarcely dare to renew them, but I desire that the future shall find me more watchful and more courageous, and I trust in Thee to accord me the aid of Thy holy grace in

maintaining them faithfully and perseveringly as long as I live. O Virgin Mary! be thou the guardian of my resolutions; I commend them to thy keeping. (*Pater noster.*)

METHOD OF MAKING A PARTICULAR EXAMEN.

This examen has reference to some one sin or to a defect which one is desirous of correcting. It is to be made daily, and after the following manner:

1. On rising make a resolution to keep careful watch during the ensuing day in order to avoid committing the particular sin or fault.

2. At midday ask God for grace to recall to mind how many times this sin has been committed, and to give you strength to withstand in the future. Review rapidly the hours which have elapsed since rising, in order to ascertain how often your resolution has been violated, noting down the number of times on the first line of a chart prepared as on p. 52.

A Key to Meditation

Sunday . . . . . .

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Monday . . . . . .

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Tuesday . . . . . .

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Wednesday . . .

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Thursday . . . . .

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Friday . . .

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Saturday

After noting carefully in this way, renew your resolution for the remainder of the day.

In the evening a second examen should be made, exactly following the lines of the first, and directed to the hours which have since elapsed.

Observations.

1. Whenever you find that you have failed in your good resolution, lay your hand at once on your heart, but in such a way as not to attract attention, and make an interior act of humility.

2. Compare the results of the two examens together each evening in order to ascertain whether any progress has been made.

3. In the same way each day and week should be contrasted with the preceding day and week.

4. It is only reasonable to infer that the actual number of faults to be recorded should gradually lessen, just as the length of the lines themselves diminishes from day to day.

Remarks on the Particular Examen.

"There is usually some evil tendency to be found in all men, which lies at the root of their every fault.

"Even if anyone were to recognize many

such evil inclinations or defects in himself, it would be none the less profitable to choose out one of these in particular in order to concentrate against it the entire energy of the soul. After this has been uprooted the rest can be combated in the same manner. It is at this that the particular examen aims."

This form of examen is most fruitful in purifying the heart, as many passages from Cassian and St. Bernard go to teach us.

METHOD FOR MAKING A FRUITFUL RETREAT ON ONE DAY IN EACH MONTH.

That day should be selected which promises most freedom, whether from occupations or from distractions. On the eve of the retreat the *Veni Creator* should be devoutly recited, in order to obtain the illumination of the Holy Spirit, followed by a Hail Mary commending the coming hours to the patronage of the Blessed Virgin. The preparatory meditation is then made.

Meditation on the Eve of a Retreat.

First Prelude.—Recall to memory the healing of the blind man at Jericho. He fell at Jesus' feet, and Jesus said to him: "What wilt thou that I should do to thee? And the blind man said to Him, Rabboni, that I may see. And Jesus saith to him, Go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." Listen to Jesus putting the same question to you, and answer Him as the blind man did: "Lord, that I may see—see during this retreat just what it is I lack and what Thou art asking from me.

Second Prelude.—My God! do Thou Thyself create those dispositions in my heart which are needful to me if I would profit well by this retreat.

First Point and First Disposition.

A True Desire to Know Oneself.—Do I desire this? Do I not rather shrink from opening up my soul to a light which may reveal so much and demand so much? If I

do truly desire this self-knowledge, I ought to examine earnestly that I may see what progress I have made in the way of perfection—what fruit the reception of the Sacraments has borne in my soul, what victories I have won over self, the world, the devil; what virtues I have practised; what merits I have garnered; what zeal I have shown for my soul's salvation. Am I ready to appear with confidence before the judgment-seat of God?

Second Point and Second Disposition.

A Great Trust in God and a Great Mistrust of Self.—I can do nothing without God, but with Him I can do all things. His grace is stronger than all the forces of hell, and it awaits me if I will but ask for it. God loves me, in spite of my infidelities, and this very retreat which offers me a means to salvation is an expression of His love towards me. "Come into the wilderness," He is saying to me, "and I will speak to thy heart." How tender His invitation is, and how powerfully

it moves me to trust in Him! O my God! I can do nothing; but Thou canst do all things. Grant me the help of Thy grace.

Third Point and Third Disposition.

Generosity.—The Lord will speak to you during this retreat. Seek to evoke in yourself that disposition which led St. Paul, crushed as he was to the very ground on his way to Damascus, to say to Jesus: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" or reply with Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth"; or protest with David: "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready." What sacrifice dost Thou look for from me? I will bring it unhesitatingly to Thee. Are there ties which must be severed? I would not cherish the least one against Thy will. Speak, Lord, my heart is ready.

Let the prayer with which the meditation opened be repeated again at its close: "Lord, that I may see; that I may see my soul with all its weakness, its imperfections, and its

sins. Blessed Virgin, obtain for me the grace of self-knowledge and humble amendment." (*Pater noster.* Hail Mary.)

Before going to rest read over the subject of the morrow's meditation, choosing it from some helpful book, and taking, for instance, a theme such as the destiny of man, the importance of salvation, the hatefulness of sin, the abuse of grace, an eternity of misery or of bliss. Failing a book, ask yourself the three following questions :

1. What has God done to promote my salvation ? Baptism, a Christian education, grace, the Sacraments, good examples, retreats. Less than these might well have sufficed to make a Saint.

2. What does God ask from me ? Fidelity to His inspirations, abhorrence of sin, victory over my passions—especially over that passion to which I yield most readily—modesty, humility, fervour. Have I all these to offer Him ?

3. What am I justified in expecting at God's hands ? His blessing is for those who are faithful to Him, but He cuts down the

barren fig-tree and roots up the unfruitful vine, and casts them into the flames. O my God ! avert this evil from me. My desire is to love and serve Thee. Deign to render fruitful the resolutions I am about to make during this retreat. (*Pater noster.* Hail Mary.)

The Day of the Retreat.

On rising, offer the day to God, asking Him for grace to pass it in a holy manner.

When your usual morning prayer is concluded, make half an hour's meditation on the subject prepared the previous evening, assisting afterwards at Mass, and receiving Holy Communion.

Spend the day in silence and recollection as far as your state of life, surroundings, and occupations permit. Unless there is good reason to the contrary, it is well that no one should perceive that you are in retreat.

During the morning read over carefully your rule of life, together with the resolutions made in previous retreats. If you have

nothing written down, try to recall the counsels given you by your confessor, especially those upon which he has dwelt most often. Take count of your state before God, and resolve to amend whatever displeases Him in your soul. In order the better to do this, half an hour or an hour may be devoted, if time permit, to a consideration of the actual state of the soul, as set forth below.

During the afternoon visit the Blessed Sacrament and our Lady, according to the time at your disposal. The excellent book written by St. Alfonso de Liguori may then be profitably used. Half an hour should be devoted to spiritual reading, and the day brought to a close by the exercise in preparation for death, a method for which is given later on.

Consideration of the Actual State of the Soul.

After invoking the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we proceed to review, in the presence of God, the most important actions of our

lives, in order that we may ascertain in what spirit they are being performed, whether in respect of our duty to God and our neighbour, or of the practice of those cardinal virtues enjoined upon us.

I. *Spiritual Exercises.*—Are these of more importance to me than all beside? Am I faithful in performing them? Do I manifest that exterior reverence which is incumbent upon me—in my whole bearing, in recollection, modesty, and, above all, in the custody of the eyes? Am I careful to use beforehand that most potent means to fruitful prayer—a few moments of recollection, during which the senses and imagination are stilled, the presence of God realized, and the thought of what I am about to do brought home to my soul?

Do I watch against distractions, repelling them quietly, or, if unable to free myself entirely from their importunity, taking care to disavow them by a humble act of the will? Do I not chafe against spiritual aridity, instead of enduring it humbly and patiently, as a well-merited punishment for

my negligence? Do I never yield to discouragement on this score?

At this point the principal exercises should be passed in review, that we may ascertain how we acquit ourselves in regard to them, and what fruit they produce in our souls.

Mental Prayer.—Preparation for it, causes of failure, dissipation of mind, earthly ties.

General and Particular Examen.—Are these made with care, and with a sincere desire to amend, or with negligence, and a cowardly condoning of what they reveal? Do I impose any penance upon myself in expiation of my faults?

Spiritual Reading. — Is this dictated by my needs or by a spirit of curiosity? Is it carried out perseveringly, avoiding capricious changes either of book or of subject? with prayerfulness and desire, and the petition that grace may render it fruitful? Am I careful to pause for awhile over any passage which seems to me specially adapted to the needs of my own soul, and to close the reading by a few moments given to recol-

lection, in order that the spiritual lessons it inculcates may be more surely garnered in ?

Mass—Vocal Prayers—The Divine Office.—How much reverent attention and devotion do I bring to these ? What are the dispositions of my soul when listening to the Word of God ?

Confession.—Has this become a matter of routine, devoid of real desire to amend, or to excite true contrition for my faults ? Do I accuse myself frankly, generously, and clearly, leaving on one side those thousand trifles which only tend to obscure the real issues ? Do I follow up my confession by making some particular resolutions ?

Holy Communion.—Do I forego this because of scruples, or receive it out of a desire for vainglory ? Am I careful in preparing for it, offering some little sacrifice each time to this end ? How do I make my act of thanksgiving ? What fruit does it yield ? What use do I make of spiritual communion ?

II. *Habitual Disposition of my Soul towards God.*—Have I that reverence, submission to His providence, love, trust, thankfulness, and

solicitude to please Him, which are due to a Master, Father, Friend, and Spouse? . . . Is my intention pure and often renewed? . . . Do I realize that His eyes are ever upon me? . . . Am I vigilant in maintaining integrity of conscience? . . . Do I not condone many faults in myself on the ground that they are only venial? What measure of love have I for our Lord Jesus Christ, what devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, to our Lady, the Saints, my Patron Saint, my Guardian Angel?

III. *Dispositions towards my Neighbour.*— Do I cherish a spirit of kindliness, of charitable estimates of others, of gentleness and patience, or do I yield to bitterness, jealousy, dislike, and an attitude of criticism, giving rise to backbiting, slandering, rash judgments, unfriendly dealings, desires for revenge, rivalries, caballings, gibes, displays of ill-humour, and outbursts of anger? Do I look upon my neighbour with the eye of faith, beholding in him or her the God Who says, "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me." How

easy a thing does mutual forbearance become when we conceive of it in the light of these words!

IV. *Care for the Salvation and Perfection of One's Soul.*—Do I esteem this my supreme, my only, concern? What progress have I made in virtues—self-renunciation and the spirit of penance? Have I at least learnt how to turn to profit those occasions which offer for suffering and for a patient and uncomplaining carrying of the Cross? What sacrifices do I exact from myself in order to please God and in expiation of my faults?

What are my dispositions in regard to the cardinal virtues? . . . Faith and the spirit of faith as a governing factor in every circumstance of life; hope and trust, together with that interior peace which flows from them, and rules out all anxiety, discouragement, and faint-heartedness; obedience, as may be demanded by my state of life, and involving the sacrifice of my own will; detachment from earthly good of whatever nature; chastity, and the avoidance of all

that might tend to sully it ; curiosity, light-mindedness, ungoverned affections ; humility and distrust of self. Do I welcome, or, at the least, bear with patience, humiliations, contempt, the disregard of others, or preferences shown at my expense ? Am I free from vanity, self-complacency, a desire to outshine or dominate others, a spirit of contempt in regard to my neighbour ?

V. *What Response does my Soul make to Grace and its Divine Inspirations ?*—What victories have I won over my ruling passion ? What efforts have I made to subdue nature, and to detach my heart from the love of creatures ? Does some ill-regulated affection still lurk there, barring the way to perfection, and denying to God that sacrifice which He has so long asked from me ? If this be so, what is it, and how can it be rooted out ? Where lies the justification for delay ?

Is my time well or ill employed—in useful or in frivolous occupations ? Do I indulge in idle conversations, purposeless reading, vague flights of the imagination, castles in the air, day-dreams which may imperil the

soul in so many ways? Every moment of time is charged with eternal value. What would not the lost soul give for one such moment?

VI. *The manner in which we fulfil the obligations imposed on us by our state of life and daily round of duty* is also a matter for serious consideration. We are apt to dwell too exclusively upon life's duties in general, and take insufficient count of those personal obligations which, nevertheless, call for such earnest care and zeal, such fidelity, vigilance, and perseverance, if we would ensure the vanquishing of repugnances which are sometimes strong enough to deflect souls from the path of duty altogether.

To sum up—is my life, like that of the just, a life of faith, lived in the power of the spirit of faith, which sees everything from the eternal standpoint? or is it a life dominated by self-love, and by that spirit of the world which takes count of nothing beyond the fleeting things of the present life?

All this is what we need to consider in the

sight of God, in order that we may expiate by repentance the faults thus revealed, provide against fresh occasions of falling which will surely present themselves, renew our resolutions humbly and trustfully, and go forward on our course with rekindled ardour, setting all our hope in God, and never suffering ourselves to be cast down even by the sight of our own misery.

EXERCISE IN PREPARATION FOR DEATH

Kneeling before your crucifix, represent to yourself that your last hour has come, and that as in old time the prophet was sent to warn Ezechias, so now an angel appears to bid you "Give charge concerning thy house, for thou shalt die, and not live."

Ask from God the Grace of a Good Death.

First Point. — What does death mean? I must face death; that is, (1) I must leave

all behind me—parents, friends, family, possessions, lands—everything. To whom do I cling most closely, and what do I cherish most ? for separation will come as surely from these as from all else. A great dread takes hold on me as I contemplate this unutterable loneliness, and yet it is this very thing that death will mean. With the knowledge of it, shall I create earthly ties, spend and harass my soul over this fleeting life ? No—a thousand times no !

I must face death ; that is, (2) my soul will be separated from my body, and this body will become an unsightly corpse, devoid of movement and life, and fitted only to inspire pity or horror. It will be laid in the grave, and worms will devour it. Corruption will claim every member as its own—this head, these eyes, this tongue, these feet and hands. . . . Shall I risk my soul and its eternity for a mere handful of clay ? No—a thousand times no !

Second Point.—When and how shall I die ? It is not given to me to know. Death comes to one at any age, anywhere, from any

source. Shall I have time to prepare for it? Shall I receive the last Sacraments? I trust this may be granted me, but I do not know. The end has come so swiftly and unexpectedly to many; perhaps it will come as suddenly to me. When one is ill—above all, when the last agony begins—it is no easy thing to prepare for death. Memory fails, the understanding grows dim, even the will loses power to act, and yet eternity itself is at stake!

Third Point.—Am I ready to die now? Free from all ties that would hold me to earth? Am I ready to come before the judgment-seat of God with a conscience clear of sin? Can I face without fear the remembrance of my confessions, my Holy Communions, the countless graces received? O dread day! when I shall stand to render account before a God Who is supremely just, all-knowing, all-powerful, and a hater of sin!

At the close of these solemn considerations kneel down and make your resolutions and the following acts:

Act of Resignation.

O my God, and Sovereign Lord of life and death, Who hast irrevocably decreed that every man shall die once as a penalty for sin, behold me humbly prostrate before Thee, ready to submit to this law of Thy justice. I deplore with anguish of soul all those sins with which I am laden. Rebellious sinner that I am, I have merited death a thousand times. I accept it in expiation of these sins, in the spirit of obedience to Thy adorable will, and in union with the death of my Saviour. Let it come to me, O my God, when and where Thou wilt, and in the way it shall please Thee to ordain. I will profit by the respite Thy mercy accords me to detach my heart from a world where my sojourn can be but brief at the best, to break every tie which binds me to this land of exile, and to prepare my soul for the dread ordeal of Thy judgments. . . .

I surrender myself unreservedly into the hands of Thy all-fatherly Providence. May

Thy will be done always, and in all things! Amen.

Prayer for the Grace of a Good Death.

Prostrate before the throne of Thy adorable Majesty, I come, O my God, to ask Thee for that last grace of all—the grace to die well. However ill a use I have made of this life Thou hast given me, grant me Thy grace to end it well, and to die in Thy love.

May I die, as did the holy patriarchs, free from all regret at quitting this vale of tears, and prepared for the enjoyment of eternal repose in my true country!

May I die, like Blessed Joseph, in the arms of Jesus and Mary, repeating the sweet names which I desire to praise throughout eternity!

May I die, like the Blessed Virgin, consumed with pure love, burning with desire to be united to the one Object of my every affection!

May I die, like Jesus on the cross, filled with deep hatred of sin, with love to my

Heavenly Father, and resignation in the midst of sufferings!

Holy Father, I commit my soul into Thy hands; have mercy on me.

Jesus, Who didst die for the love of me, give me the grace to die in Thy love.

Holy Mary, Mother of my God, pray for me, now and at the hour of my death.

Heavenly Angel, faithful Guardian of my soul, and great Saints whom God has given me for my patrons, forsake me not at the hour of my death.

St. Joseph, obtain for me by thy intercession that I may die the death of the just. Amen.

Prayer to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Soul of Jesus, sanctify me.

Body of Jesus, save me.

Blood of Jesus, inebriate me.

Water flowing from the side of Jesus, wash me.

Passion of Jesus, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me, etc. . . .

P. Zucchi's Prayer to the Blessed Virgin.

O my Queen and my Mother! I offer myself wholly to thee, and to prove my devotion I consecrate to thee this day my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, and my entire being; since I am thine, O my good Mother, watch over me and protect me as thy property and possession.

Aspiration in Temptation.

O my Queen and my Mother! remember that I am thine; keep me and defend me as thy property and possession.

Efficacious Prayer to St. Joseph.

O St. Joseph, father and protector of virgins, faithful guardian to whose care Jesus, Himself Very Innocence, was committed, and Mary, Virgin of virgins, I implore and entreat thee by Jesus and Mary, that twofold treasure so precious to thee, obtain for me that I may be preserved from

all defilement, and with purity of heart and body may serve Jesus and Mary continually in perfect chastity. Amen.

RULES FOR THE DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

It is of high importance to the soul to discern between the spirits seeking to influence it, in order that it may surrender itself to the good, and learn to repel the evil. To this end some rules are here given, of which the first are specially adapted to those as yet little advanced in the way of perfection, whilst the second are offered to meet the needs of those souls which have travelled further along this way.

First Division.

Rule 1.—To such souls as fall easily into mortal sin the evil spirit offers, as a rule, carnal pleasures and enjoyments appealing to the senses; the good Spirit, on the other hand, seeks to withdraw the soul from sin by

instilling compunction, quickening the light of reason, etc.

Rule 2.—Souls eager to be purified and to progress greatly in the service of God are led by the Evil One into trouble of mind, scrupulousness and false reasonings, etc., to the end that they may be filled with misgivings and perplexity. The Spirit of God brings courage, consolation, and light, giving peace of mind and sweet tears and freedom from all that would impede our progress.

Rule 3.—Spiritual consolation implies for us every joy which draws our hearts to prayer, to the grace of salvation, and to peace with God; every increase in faith, hope, and charity—everything, in short, which teaches us to love the Creator, and detaches us from the love of creatures. Desolation means for us darkness, confusion of mind, mistrust concerning our salvation, earthly desires, despondency, and spiritual torpor, which check the progress of the soul in the path of holy virtue, and lead us to despair of God's compassionate mercies towards us.

Rule 4.—In times of consolation the soul is, as a rule, guided by the good Spirit; in desolation the evil spirit seeks to assume the mastery. Hence, when in this latter state we must refrain from deciding on any course of action or from changing in any respect resolutions which have already been made.

Rule 5.—Times of consolation should be used as a preparation for the trials of desolation, by humbling ourselves and strengthening the weak points in our soul's armour. Our watchword, then, must be "Vigilance!"

Rule 6.—In desolation God is either chastising us, and we must turn to prayer, self-examination, and mortification in order to seek His forgiveness, or else He is proving us, being desirous of teaching us that all consolation is His free gift, bestowed or withheld, as He may choose, and we must therefore wait on Him in patience and quiet trust. Nothing contributes so much to the discomfiture of the Evil One as an intrepid spirit and the opening up of the heart to our spiritual director.

SECOND DIVISION.

Rule 1.—All spiritual joys which dissipate the sadness and trouble of mind inspired by the Evil One come to us from God or through the medium of His holy angels; all false reasonings, however specious, are the work of the evil spirit.

Rule 2.—God alone can bring to the soul consolation as sudden as its source is hidden, since only He can draw it to Himself, and transform it wholly by the power of His love. In the moments following immediately upon the according of this celestial favour we must be careful to scrutinize those impulses which we experience, lest they should spring from the workings of our own natural activity or from the suggestions of the Evil One.

Rule 3.—The good Spirit always leads us onward to a deeper knowledge and more perfect practice of good. The leading of the evil spirit is a contrary one, and although, as a rule, transformed into an angel of light, he may seem to further the soul's pious desires,

he draws it in the end, little by little, into the snares which he is so skilled to conceal. After being thus deluded at his hands, it is well to look back and note what it was that laid us open to attack, so that the salutary experience may serve to safeguard us in the future.

Rule 4.—A thought may be certainly judged to be inspired by our good angel when, after careful scrutiny of its inception, growth, and outcome, we find it wholly good. But if any evil lurks in it, tending to deflect us from good—as, for example, from some higher good which we had set before us as our aim, or if it robs us of peace by reason of the weariness, anxiety, or anguish of mind which it induces—we must unhesitatingly ascribe it to the workings of the evil spirit.

Rule 5.—The entrance of a spirit into the soul brings with it a sense of peace or turmoil, according as the disposition of the soul itself harmonizes with its influence or the reverse. Thus, the presence of the good Spirit is revealed by quietness and sweet

serenity within a soul which is advancing along the path of holiness, whilst the evil spirit, on the other hand, throws it into confusion by its rough, overmastering, and turbulent onset. Where the spiritual plight of a soul grows daily more evil, the conditions are reversed.

METHODS TO BE ADOPTED FOR ARRIVING AT A RIGHT DECISION

Three occasions offer themselves to us as specially suited for arriving at a wise and just decision when our course is doubtful.

The first is present when Divine grace imparts so strong an impulse to the will as to free the soul from any doubt whatever as to the clear indication of the will of God, and the necessity for obedience. So it was with St. Matthew, St. Paul, and others whom Jesus Christ summoned to follow Him in no ordinary way.

The second offers whenever God's will is made known to us in a sufficiently clear manner, either by means of His consolations

or by those diverse interior motions experienced by the soul, which must be read in the light of the rules given above, or of the advice given by a wise director.

The third occasion is open to the soul when, no longer confused by diverse and contrary spirits, but in calm and tranquil possession of itself, it finds itself free to make full use of all its natural resources. At such a time, should God's will fail to be manifest in either of the ways indicated above, one of the following methods may be profitably employed in order that we may attain to a reasonable certainty in regard to it.

First Method.

1. Set out before your mind the matter which calls for decision.

2. Remembering that the end of your creation is to bring glory to God and to save your soul, refrain from leaning either to one side or the other, but, holding the balance perfectly true, keep yourself in readiness to turn your steps unhesitatingly in whatever

direction you may be led to see will tend most surely to the fulfilment of this twofold end.

3. Implore God of His goodness to enlighten your mind and Himself to guide your will in the choice which lies before you; but seek, nevertheless, through the use of reason illuminated by faith, to arrive at a decision conformable to His Divine will.

4. Weigh with earnest care the advantages and aids which a decision in any given direction may be likely to offer you as against a contrary one; and note, on the other hand, the dangers and detriment to which it might expose you in respect of the attainment of your end.

5. After a serious comparison of the results arrived at, take your decision on what appear to you to be the most reasonable grounds, without suffering yourself to be influenced in any way by the desires of the natural man.

6. Turn immediately to prayer, and offer your resolution to God with the determination to fulfil it absolutely in so far as it accords

with His Divine will. During prayer we shall either find ourselves confirmed in the resolution taken, and the seal of the Divine approval thus set upon it, or we may be led to doubt the wisdom of it, when recourse must be had to the rules previously given. If, however, the doubt seems devoid of solid foundation, and nothing presents itself otherwise to justify reconsideration, we should quietly adhere to our first resolution.

Should the method just given not suffice to enlighten the soul as to the will of God in respect of any course of action, the following one may then be used :

Second Method.

1. Since the desire or inclination which determines our choice should derive from heaven and the love of God, be careful to assure yourself, by diligent search, that the affection experienced, be it little or great, has its veritable and sole source in the pure love and contemplation of God.

2. If some one who was personally unknown

to you, but for whose perfection you were, nevertheless, concerned, were placed in the position in which you now find yourself, how would you advise that soul, having regard to the greater glory of God and its own perfecting? Counsel your own soul in just that same way.

3. What shall I wish to have been my decision when I come to stand face to face with death? Let me take that decision now.

4. What choice shall I desire to have made when summoned before the judgment of my God? Make that your choice now, and your heart will experience a deeper assurance at that dreaded moment.

5. Your decision once taken, kneel down and offer it to our Lord, entreating Him of His grace to bless it.

The two methods given above were recommended by St. Ignatius, who was himself in the habit of employing them whenever a decision in regard to any matter of importance devolved upon him.

APPENDIX

INSTRUCTIONS

DESTINED FOR THE AID AND CONSOLATION OF SOULS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN FAMILIAR INTERCOURSE WITH GOD AND DISTRACTIONS IN MENTAL PRAYER

FIRST INSTRUCTION

THAT MENTAL PRAYER IS BOTH EXCELLENT AND NEEDFUL

PRAYER, say the Fathers, is the lifting up of the soul to God, whereby our mind and heart seek union with the primal truth and the primal goodness. It is a reverent homage which our every faculty concurs in rendering to the Divine omnipotence and majesty, before which it bows down in entire submission.

St. Chrysostom, in his beautiful homilies

on prayer, tells us that prayer is to the soul as the nerves to the body, as ramparts to a city, arms to the soldier, wings to the bird, and breath to living things. "We esteem," says he, "that body to be lifeless which has ceased to breathe, and in the same way we must judge that soul to be dead which has ceased to pray."

He alludes here, I admit, to prayer in its widest sense, both mental and vocal; but since mental prayer is the very source and vital principle of all prayer, if it be conceded that it is necessary to pray, we may safely assert that it is no less necessary to meditate, seeing that vocal prayer, dissociated from reflection, cannot be termed prayer at all, but rather a vain and mischievous occupation. It is, however, not to this form of meditation that we are referring at the moment, but to a purely mental prayer, which is most assuredly to be esteemed more excellent than vocal prayer, save in so far as the latter is enjoined upon us, and becomes a matter of obligation.

Certain well-known writers, quoted by

Suarez, have maintained that mental prayer was binding on all, and that without it salvation was impossible; but this assertion needs to be qualified if we would avoid misconception. We may fairly believe that their use of the term "meditation" implies in such a connexion the uplifting of the mind to God, to which is added the reflection that enables the soul to receive the Sacraments well, to conceive sorrow for sin, to ask for special graces from God, and to make the necessary acts of faith, hope, and charity.

However this may be, it is at least certain that mental prayer is rich in the fruits it yields, and, morally speaking, a necessity to those who aim—I will not say at the religious, but even at the Christian life, whether they are but beginners, or far advanced on the road, or already perfected.

Those entering upon this form of prayer should seek purity of heart by means of frequent confession and continual mortification; for confession does away with the act of sin, whilst mortification strikes at its very

root. Both the one and the other have need to be reinforced by meditation.

The penitent soul is called upon to abhor its sins, but to conceive this abhorrence implies the realization of the hatefulness of sin. How can this be attained without reflection, consideration, and meditation? It will be understood that I am not now speaking of that self-examination which is concerned with the commandments of God and the Church, and is a form of meditation as profitable as it is necessary.

To mental prayer the soul that desires to mortify itself must turn for potent aid, since this mortification wages war with Nature, and is wholly contrary to her inclinations. It is an instrument which threatens her destruction, and brings into play the natural law of self-preservation. Hence it is clear that a soul needs to be lifted above itself by prayer, if it is to conceive that holy spirit of mortification which leads it to forego what it loves and to embrace what it fears. This holds true alike for those but entering on the path and for souls already far advanced

along it, for, just as the former are powerless to uproot their vices, so the latter are unable to acquire virtues, save by the aid of prayer. Only in prayer does the beauty of holy virtues shine out on the soul, teaching it to love them, and spurring it to their conquest.

The great Cardinal Bellarmine, whose piety and erudition were alike illustrious, maintains that it is prayer which imparts vitality, so to speak, to all virtues, and safeguards them within the soul.

By prayer faith is enlightened, and those objects are made clear to our vision which the senses ever tend to banish into a dim and distant background.

By prayer hope is sustained, for it opens up access to God and to familiar intercourse with Him, and unites us with the true Source of our being.

By prayer we are led to see the vanity, inconstancy, and faithlessness of creatures, to conceive distaste for the world, and to burn with that love of God which springs from the knowledge and experience we therein obtain of His goodness.

By prayer we are taught self-knowledge and priceless lessons in humility ; we are led to realize and sound the depths of our nothingness, and to behold that majesty and holiness of God in the face of which our fancied virtues fade away, losing all beauty, form, and substance.

Lastly, by prayer we are brought into those holy desert solitudes where the soul meets with God alone in peace, repose, silence, and recollection. It bears us in spirit down to Purgatory, and shows us our place there ; to the graveyard, where we shall one day lie ; into heaven to see the throne awaiting us ; to the Valley of Josaphat to behold our Judge; to Bethlehem to look upon our Saviour ; to Thabor to contemplate our Beloved ; to Calvary to gaze upon our Example. An entire volume would not suffice to set forth the treasures of grace which prayer opens up to the faithful soul, and the consolations which God Himself bestows upon it therein in the midst of its sorrows and trials.

It is true that not every soul is free to devote much time daily to mental prayer,

but I am none the less convinced that without it Christian perfection is unattainable, unless the lack be counterbalanced by spiritual reading, the advice of a holy confessor, and the instruction imparted by enlightened preachers.

There is assuredly no need to demonstrate that souls which have already arrived at perfection must be great lovers of prayer, since we have shown that it is prayer which unites us to God, and that in this very union consists our perfection. No Saints were ever known to whom prayer was not a habitual occupation and an unfailing source of consolation. We may truly say that with them life was one continual prayer in obedience to the injunction of the Son of God, and that they lifted up their hearts to Heaven with every breath they drew. Like St. Augustine, I cannot but conclude that to live well we must know how to pray well; and, inversely, to pray well we must know how to live well. Our progress in the science of mental prayer depends to a great extent upon the holiness of our daily life.

SECOND INSTRUCTION

The Dispositions requisite for Prayer

Poverty is eloquent enough. If we would know how to pray well, we need but to have sounded our own misery. No advocate at the Bar is a readier pleader of the cause entrusted to him than is the poor man bent on obtaining a gift from one who he knows well is able to accord it. If our prayers are cold, it is because we have failed to realize our miserable estate, and conceive of ourselves as needing nothing. And yet, just as no man is to be found who wholly lacks desires, so we should look in vain for one wholly free from want. Great wealth, after all, is only beggary disguised beneath a golden mantle. The bondage of a King is a more real bondage than that endured by his subjects, and a simple artisan, needing but the strength of his own arms, is a freer man than he who stands in want of the service of all. It is plain, therefore, that greatness is nothing but a gilded servitude. The David who

became so strong, so eloquent, and so faithful in prayer looked upon himself as a very beggar before God.

It is no otherwise with us all. Since none are free from misery, it follows that there are none who cannot pray and ask from God the help they need; and yet how few we find who are able to hold familiar converse with Him. From the moment that Moses had spoken with God he shrank from intercourse with his fellow-men, and besought Him to relieve him from the task of bearing His commands to Pharaoh. On the other hand, how many there are whose culture enables them to converse on equal terms with men, but who find themselves dumb before God. Whence does this arise? From a heart held captive by sin and the love of created things. Where its treasure is, thither the heart itself takes flight. Love finds its joy in communion with its loved ones What wonder, then, that he who is devoid of love to God flees His presence and His companionship? Let a soul be but detached from all created things, and it will find a sweetness stored up for it

in prayer beyond what it can either utter or conceive.

The Apostles once asked our Lord, "Lord, teach us to pray." What a strange request! Man is the most miserable of all beings, and is yet unconscious of his misery; in need of everything, and yet ignorant of what to ask for! Truly we see here the outcome of sin, which darkens our understanding and robs our will of its power to act.

Still more deplorable it is to find souls aware of their wretchedness, and yet unwilling to seek a remedy. They know their evil plight, but they cannot bring themselves to manifest it. They come before God, but they have nothing to say to Him. For them prayer is one perpetual distraction of heart and mind.

If we would remedy an evil alike so common and so grievous, we must seek means to render mental prayer a light and not a burdensome thing to all. To attain this end, an infinitude of counsels is to be found in books, but I know no shorter way than the way of detachment and mortification. When you have

learnt how to weep, you will have learnt how to pray, and your meditation will be good in proportion as your mortification is ungrudging. Prayer is a fire which none but the wood of the Cross can nourish. How can that heart remain silent in the presence of God which is agitated by earthly passions, and a prey to every desire suggested by a sensual, covetous, or ambitious nature ? So pure and delicate a thing as grace finds no dwelling-place for itself where the senses reign supreme. If the heart is to be uplifted to God, it must be freed from earthly ties, and the soul that wills to be united to God in prayer must first seek detachment from all created things by the path of mortification.

You may reply to me : " How is mortification to be practised unless the soul has already learnt to pray, for prayer is no less a means to mortification than is mortification to prayer ?" This I admit to the full, and for that reason they must never be considered apart from one another. Be the difficulties in the way of prayer what they may, it must none the less be steadfastly adhered to, for

these very difficulties are in themselves an abundant source of mortification, fitting the soul for the reception of great graces. God leads us into fuller light in proportion as we follow that which He has given us already. Do what you can, and God will do what you ask.

THIRD INSTRUCTION

On Distractions

It is an excellent saying of St. Bonaventura that all spiritual exercises have for their aim the acquisition of a threefold knowledge—of God, of man, and of the means whereby man may be united to God. Mental prayer is one of the several paths which lead to this union, but it is no easy task to persevere in it, seeing that the Evil One does his utmost to detach the soul from the practice of it, tormenting it with distractions and unholy thoughts. He would fain persuade it to renounce the effort, seeking to prove that it is mere waste of time; that the necessary dispositions are lacking; that to pray in such a fashion is not

to pray at all, but calculated rather to draw down the wrath of God ; that it is better to forego meditation than to make it so irreverently, as it would seem ; that the individual temperament is too active, the imagination too volatile, occupations too pressing ; that it does not know how to converse freely with God ; that His apparent indifference to the soul's approaches is not to be borne, and that it is better to have recourse to commoner forms of devotion, leaving this exercise to others who are more skilled to use it aright. It is not rare to find souls credulous enough to yield to this temptation, and to abandon God lest they should offend Him.

The cure for so great an evil lies in persuading ourselves of three things :

First, that, of all the remedies we can bring to bear upon distractions, the worst and the most pernicious is to abandon prayer. This is the very thing at which our enemy aims, knowing well that, once the channel of grace is blocked, a soul must wither and die for lack of nourishment.

Secondly, that the difference between con-

solation and devotion is a very real one. Consolation has reference, in the main, to the senses, devotion dwells in the heart ; consolation is transient, devotion abiding. We may experience consolation without devotion, but we may also cherish devotion even though devoid of consolation. A soul may be well content and wholly surrendered to the good pleasure of God even in the midst of the greatest aridity, and its state will then be one of supreme devotion ; for, according to the teaching of St. Theresa, true devotion consists in the determination of the will to do whatever God may demand with generous alacrity and fidelity. It may, therefore, be truly affirmed that no soul is more devout than the soul bare of consolation and devoid of all devotional feeling, provided only that it remain faithful to prayer, and is content to accept its present disposition as God's appointment, whether by way of chastisement or to the end that it may be the more wholly sanctified.

Thirdly, we must learn to understand that distractions and desolations are not the evil

things one imagines them to be, but rather a precious mine whence infinite treasures may be drawn if the true vein be patiently worked. To this end we must trace to their source the aridities and distractions which beset the soul.

FOURTH INSTRUCTION

Whence Distractions and Aridities proceed

Were I to attempt to reproduce here all that the Fathers have written on this subject, a large volume would indeed be required. St. Bonaventura speaks of five sources of distractions, Gerson of no fewer than seventeen. Speaking generally, they may all be summed up as referable to God, to man himself, and to the Evil One.

God works nothing but good, and whether He draws near or seems to forsake us, He has no end in view but our salvation. The absence of the sun is almost as necessary to the earth as its presence, for thereby the alternations of day and night are brought

about; and night, though less beautiful, perhaps, than the day, is no less needful. Now, God withdraws and hides Himself from us during prayer for many reasons.

In the first place, He wills to keep us humble. Man's pride is an inexplicable thing. He can do nothing, and yet deems himself to be his own master. His misery is boundless, but it fails to persuade him of his need of mercy. If God accords him any grace, he ascribes it to his own merit or effort, and thus robs his Author of the glory due to Him. If some small fish becomes entangled in the meshes of his net, it is to his net that he offers sacrifice, as the prophet says, and not to God; if he triumphs, he kisses his own hand, and not the hand of the Lord Who gave him victory, thereby, as Job says, committing a grievous sin and impiety, akin to that of a man who denies the very existence of a God.

Hence, in order to reveal to man his own misery and dependence, God withdraws His consolations from him, depriving him of the sweetness of His grace that he may learn to feel the want of it. In darkness such as this

He shows man what he is, and in spiritual desolation He teaches him to plumb the depths of his need, and to ask that it may be supplied. "My God!" said the great St. Augustine, "teach me to know myself, and teach me to know Thee." We cannot know God unless we know ourselves, and the knowledge of self is won in the school of poverty.

In the same school we learn the excellence of grace. A high value is often set on things in proportion to their rarity; for abundance, as Tertullian says, tends to lessen the esteem in which we hold them, and the true worth of a possession is not seldom best gauged when we have lost it. If God gave us manna from heaven every day, we might, like the Israelites, learn to turn from it with aversion; but when He withholds it we begin to realize the greatness of the gift, and so to desire it more fervently, to ask for it more humbly, to seek it more assiduously, to find it more joyfully, and to guard it with more anxious solicitude and vigilance. "Oh! how great is the danger," says St. Bernard, "lest unthankful souls be abandoned by grace,

seeing that they do not look upon it as grace, but rather as a possession of which they hold themselves to be the rightful owners." He is speaking here of that grace of sensible devotion which God often withdraws from holy souls, whilst leaving them all that suffices to strengthen them against temptation, and to enable them to fulfil His will.

Privation such as this is painful, but it is essential, not merely that we may be maintained in humility, and taught to prize grace aright, but also that our merit may be enhanced; for, as I am about to show, the tender and devout emotions experienced at times in prayer are in themselves no source of merit: they do not lift the soul, so to speak, above itself, nor does Nature fail to find in them some hidden aliment and satisfaction. In sensible devotion charity is rarely perfectly pure, neither does it grow the humbler in spiritual exultation, nor more patient amid spiritual delights. It is for this reason that God leaves a soul in darkness and desolation, as He once told St. Theresa. This Saint was often surprised to

hear those well advanced in the spiritual life complaining of aridity, for she knew that in this state the soul honours God more truly, acquires greater merit, and practises every virtue more perfectly.

At such times the true followers and lovers of God are made manifest. There are many who say with David, when surrounded by abundance of grace, that nothing can have power to disturb the peace of their soul ; but when poverty comes they are troubled and cast down. Others, again, protest with St. Peter, when seated at the banquet, that they will never forsake their Master ; but in temptation they deny Him, even as he did. Man is inconceivably weak, and still more inconceivably presumptuous. What he takes to be light is often very darkness. His poverty is no sooner realized than it is forgotten, and a little strength suffices to persuade him that he is immortal. Hence it is that God proves and tries us, not that He may know us, since what we are is known to Him already, but that we may learn to know ourselves. For this reason He put Abraham to the test.

"Now I know," He said to him, "that thou art My servant, and I no longer doubt thy fidelity, because of the obedience thou hast rendered Me." The Angel Raphael spoke after the same manner to holy Tobias: "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."

This state of aridity is, therefore, by no means so great an evil as we conceive it to be, since God suffers it to keep us humble, to try our love, to teach us the excellence of grace, and to augment our merit. Some one will doubtless be found to reply that he would endure this spiritual dryness more readily if only he were assured that it was truly God's appointment, but that his distress arises from the fact that distractions assail him through his own fault, and as a chastisement for his negligences and infidelities. We will make answer to this complaint later on, pausing only for the moment to bid the soul take courage, to suffer patiently that chastisement which it believes itself to have merited, and thus, by its humility, to supply what has been lacking to its charity.

It is not to be denied that distractions frequently spring from man himself, finding their source in too great mental activity, impetuous passions, bodily infirmity, and a restless imagination, or it may be in some infidelity or undue attachment to creatures. But all these distractions are innocent in themselves, provided that the will disowns them, and only those involve sin which the heart itself cherishes, since the heart alone, as God made it, is free to welcome or reject them.

When speaking of the deliberate action of the will, we must not omit to include within its scope the maintenance of a spirit of recollection throughout the day; for if the mind be filled with vain and unprofitable images, it will be difficult to prevent their intrusion during the hours of prayer. Thus, the Fathers and masters of the spiritual life teach us that the soul must be emptied before it can be filled, and must learn to conserve during the day those dispositions which it desires to have in prayer. The emptiness here meant is not that of the mind, but of the heart. There are many whose one concern is to

combat their thoughts and not their passions. They cling to everything, and yet claim to be free from distractions in prayer ; they are agitated by unmortified desires, and yet look for a peace which they themselves render impossible. If the mind is to be recollected the heart must be emptied, and a life of detachment is the price to be paid for the true spirit of prayer, since the heart turns instinctively to what it treasures, and the thoughts find their centre where the heart leads the way.

There is a state attainable by the soul in which it no longer reasons nor meditates. It has entered into possession, so to speak, of all the Christian verities, and after much toil it is ripe for repose, even as the beloved disciple rested on the Master's bosom as they sat at meat. The distractions by which a soul is visited when in this state are not to be traced to any evil source, but rather to be considered as an indication of abundant spiritual well-being, and as necessitating some variation in its method of prayer and approaches to God. Thus, if the heart is de-

tached from creatures, and you are unswerving in your fidelity to the spiritual exercises enjoined upon you, these very drynesses and distractions will yield a harvest of grace so rich as to enable you to exclaim with the Wise Man : " I have laboured a little, and have found much rest to myself." Oh, blessed indeed are they who die in the Lord ! Their good works will await them as a garnered crop, they will savour the fruit of their labours, the God of peace will wipe away their tears, and the remainder of their days shall be free from all cares and disquietude, all grief and pain.

The third cause of the distractions which beset us is to be found in the devices of our enemy, the Spirit of Evil. Knowing well how profitable a thing is prayer, he does his best to render it irksome to the soul, urging it to relinquish what is merely loss of time and an offence to God, rather than a pleasing sacrifice. He weighs down the soul with drowsiness, despondency, and harassing moods, inspiring unholy thoughts, to which, if the soul yields, his point is gained ; whilst

if it rejects them with horror he finds in its very distress a means to assail it the more vehemently. He persuades it that such thoughts are infinitely displeasing to God, but that freedom from them entails the abandonment of prayer, since this offers occasion to these phantoms to rise up and haunt the imagination. Alas! how many souls yield credence to the suggestions of the enemy, and withdraw, like trembling, fugitive Cain, from the presence of God!

Having thus passed in review the causes of this great evil, it now remains for us to seek out the remedy.

FIFTH INSTRUCTION

That the Soul must never suffer itself to be disturbed by Distractions and Aridity

To endure with joy, or at least with patience, the privation of Divine sweetness and consolation, we need to be fully persuaded of two truths. In the first place, that such a state is not in itself evil; and, in the second

place, that through its means much good may be effected and much merit acquired.

The first statement stands in need of no proof ; it requires only to be clearly affirmed. Sin, to be sin at all, implies the consent of the will ; hence your distractions are in themselves innocent if you do not deliberately dwell on them, even though they were to persist throughout the whole time set apart for prayer.

You will reply, perhaps, that they result from what, in the first instance, was undeniably voluntary, and that you have therefore given them occasion ; but even if this be true, you must not suffer yourself to be troubled, nor still less be induced to relinquish prayer. Either their cause is known to you or unknown. If the latter, you must see in them a temptation from the Evil One, a hidden ordering of Divine grace, a trial of your virtue, an occasion of merit, or, it may be, some infirmity of nature, which can in no way prevent your prayer from being an acceptable sacrifice to God. If, on the other hand, you are able to trace the cause, ask

pardon from God, promise Him to amend, and accept your present suffering in the spirit of penance, in which case, believe me, you will make an excellent meditation.

To seek to remedy one evil by means of another is wholly irrational. Even though you may have failed to maintain recollection during the day, is it reasonable to flee from God because one has offended Him? Does the traveller plunge into the pathless forest because he sees that, for the moment, he has missed the track? It is a mistake to assume that mental distractions always find their source in an unguarded heart. What I have said in the preceding instruction suffices to disprove this, but even if it were the case, what is to be gained by a disquietude of spirit which enhances rather than diminishes the ill, and plunges the mind into the deepest perplexities, in lieu of uplifting and inspiring it with fresh hope?

It seems to you, so you maintain, that your prayer is idle. I do not share your view. On the contrary, I feel assured that you are never more profitably occupied than when

you believe yourself to be doing nothing. To obtain a firm grasp of this second truth, it is necessary to recognize the fact that, although a time of consolation may be far more welcome to the soul than one of desolation, its true welfare is best served in this latter state, and its merit more richly augmented. In consolation we are recipients; in desolation we are givers, and that of our very own. In the one we purpose, in the other we toil; in the first we find repose, in the second we unsheathe the sword. Are you not prepared to admit that there is greater magnanimity and spiritual gain in giving than in receiving, in labour than in ease, in the battle than in the truce?

Resistance to temptation involves a very real martyrdom, endured on behalf of faith, charity, justice, and religion. It calls for the sacrifice of body and soul, of the heart, the mind, and all terrestrial affections, to the glory of a God Who stands by to witness the combat and to crown your patience. It summons to the practice of every virtue in the noblest and most heroic manner: faith

in the midst of darkness, hope in the face of seeming dereliction, charity at the cost of interior repugnances, poverty by the deprivation of that to which we cling, patience in the fire of affliction. You are bringing all this to God, and yet you speak of doing nothing!

The soul, as I have already pointed out, merits but little in times of consolation. It cannot be certain that any one of its acts truly springs from supernatural grace—that is, from a power which surpasses all natural activities or merit. Unaided by this grace, man can believe nothing but what he hears, hope for nothing but what he conceives possible, and love nothing but what makes its appeal to his senses. Hence, when he believes what his ears cannot hear, looks in confidence for what it is beyond his power to achieve, and for God's sake loves and chooses those things which run counter to his own desires, his faith, his hope, and his charity are then veritably supernatural. To believe in the dark, to hope notwithstanding human weakness, and to love in spite of self-love—all

these are acts of virtue far beyond the reach of unaided nature, and which find their solid foundation in God alone.

Here, then, is manifest that interior work wrought by the soul which learns to abide in trust and quietness amid spiritual desolations and privations. Faith makes real for it the presence of a God Whom it cannot discern. In Him it hopes against all hope; abandons itself to Him, even though, as it seems, it has already been abandoned by Him; loves Him with a steadfast love in the midst of the revolts of nature, and in spite of despondency and moods of bitterness; conforms itself to His will, however rigorous and crucifying this may be; suffers the martyrdom of love; humbles itself in the sight of its own miseries; accepts its poverty with gladness and blesses God, as did Job on the dunghill, when it sees itself deprived of all spiritual goods, covered with wounds and festering sores, and harassed by evil spirits which seek to urge it into murmurings and impatience.

Oh, if the soul but knew what devout

worship it brings to God in prayer when it brings Him patience! If it could but reckon up those treasures of merit to which each moment adds its store, the desire to exchange its state could never exist for a single hour. Not, indeed, that God-given consolation is to be rejected, for it is a heavenly dew sent to refresh young souls as yet but lightly rooted in virtue, but we must learn to forego it ungrudgingly. Deeply taught souls do not base their peace on these transient sweetnesses, but on the ordering and providential dispositions of a God Whose will constitutes their happiness and unique consolation, and Who enables them to live a life of the spirit and of grace which far transcends that of the senses and natural appetites.

Now, is there anything more in accordance with nature than to believe in what is visible, to hope for what is tangible, and to love what appeals directly to our hearts? Is there a man living who would not believe in the presence of God if the operations of His grace made themselves sensibly felt in his heart? who would not set his hope in God if God

continually showered His favours upon him, or who would not love God if the Divine consolations were never lacking? It is clear, therefore, that supernatural faith proves itself, not in the light, but in darkness; that hope is a celestial plant nourished by affliction rather than by spiritual comfort; and that the soul loves most purely then when it is most desolate. Believe me, you are never more truly operative than when you conceive yourself to be doing nothing, and your merit is never greater than when you believe yourself to lack merit altogether, seeing that the soul, as I have already shown, produces at such times acts of Divine faith, supernatural hope, pure charity, profound mortification, Christian humility, blind obedience, and heroic patience. Then it is that man honours God with his own substance, and brings his entire being in sacrifice to Him. If this be truly so, to what end are you disquieted, ready to lose courage, on the point of abandoning prayer?

You are unable to think about God at all, you reply. Be content, then, to love

Him, and to unite your will with His, accepting as from His hand this state of suffering in which you find yourself. You cannot chain your mind to prayer? Little harm will be done if you see to it that your heart keeps true and stable.

"Alas! I am devoid of all consolation." Is it to obtain this, then, that you turn to prayer? Do you, who merit the pangs of hell, deserve that God should console you, notwithstanding the many times you have offended Him? All the same, what greater consolation can there be than to do the will of God, to abide in His presence, to give proof of our love and fidelity, to suffer a real martyrdom for His sake?

"I never know what it is to be free from distractions." If these distractions are wilful, you certainly offend God; if they are involuntary, you honour and please and love Him none the less in spite of them, since everything pleases God except sin, and where there is no question of the will there can be no question of sin. Suffering endured in prayer is a greater thing than delight in prayer. It

rises heavenward like a sweet odour, and all Paradise is filled with its perfume. Do not fail to keep in mind that saying of St. Augustine : " God delights in you if you delight in Him ; He is satisfied with you if you are satisfied with Him."

You may reply : " I am satisfied with God, but dissatisfied with myself." What reason have you for this dissatisfaction with yourself, and why do you take pleasure in hugging your misery ? You are bidden to believe that God is well pleased with you provided that you find your satisfaction in Him, and your only answer to this assurance is complaint and murmurings ! You are clearly discontented, not with yourself, but with God, because He sees fit to leave you in desolation, and fails to treat you in the way you conceive yourself to deserve.

To go a step further, I cannot see what reason you have for discontent with yourself if you are doing your utmost. " Nothing of the kind," you reply, " and there is the root of all my suffering. I seem to be conscious that I come far short of doing all that I

might." Surely this is to torment yourself in a most unreasonable manner. Tell me frankly, can you do more at this present moment than you are actually doing? If you can, why not do it? If you cannot, to what end are you troubled? The enjoyment of God constitutes the bliss alike of heaven and earth, but there is this difference—that the enjoyment we shall know in heaven will be unalloyed, whilst here on earth it is tempered by much suffering. In heaven God will be to us a God of delights; on earth we follow Him as a God of sorrows. The type of the union with God to which we are summoned in this present life is to be discerned in that which subsisted between the Sacred Humanity and the Word. As to its higher part, it dwelt in the enjoyment of bliss; as to its lower, it endured misery. No drop of consolation fell but seemed to vanish in a moment, for the Divine Heart was plunged in a sea of bitterness, meet for One Who came to expiate by His sufferings the unholy pleasures which men found in sin.

During this present life pious souls are in

the like case ; the spirit finds repose, but the senses are weighed down by affliction. From time to time, it is true, God imparts a sweetness to them such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived ; but our earthly life is a time of probation, and the sensible joy passes away. The kingdom of God, says St. Paul, does not consist in consolations, but in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, Who abides in gentle silence within the heart. Therefore, provided only that the heart itself remain steadfast, you have nothing to fear from distractions of mind. The difficulty arises from your confounding the two kinds of distractions, and from your failing to perceive that there is a union of the heart and a union of the mind, and that these are not necessarily both experienced at one and the same time. Be content, therefore, to believe that you may be intimately united to God in heart, even though the thoughts wander, and that involuntary distractions are powerless to set a barrier between you and His love.

" All this I know well enough," some pious

soul will reply, "and yet I am not satisfied. I feel a sense of anxiety and unrest in my heart which turns all my prayer into bitterness." Whence does this arise? The cause is not far to seek. It is clear that, instead of leaving self behind when you go to prayer, you take your own will with you. You want to be attentive, to be free from distractions; you want to be on fire with the love of God, to feel no coldness; you want to be in the light, and not in darkness. You will this and you shrink from that. What you desire you cannot obtain, but you find yourself faced by those very things you would fain shun. It is small wonder, then, that your heart is disquieted. Divest yourself of self-will, and your restlessness of spirit will vanish. Purify your intention when you begin your prayer; seek God's good pleasure, and not your own satisfaction. Accept any and every disposition as His appointment, and constrain yourself to believe that all conditions are in themselves profitable where sin has no entrance; that God takes up His abode once self is dislodged, filling the heart in

proportion as it is emptied. Remember that He is Spirit, and demands a spiritual adoration from us, His creatures; that a union in which the senses have their share is often fraught with danger to the soul; that times of fruit-bearing follow on times of barrenness, light succeeds darkness, and the mortification of the natural passions and desires is, of all forms of prayer, the most abundantly profitable. By such means as these the soul may be reassured and enabled to dispel the clouds which have gathered round it; but since distractions are not all traceable to one cause alone, we must now turn our thoughts to the consideration of other remedies.

SIXTH INSTRUCTION

Remedies against Distractions

On every side we hear souls complaining of distractions in prayer, and yet there are few who are willing to apply the remedy. They leave the source unchecked, whilst they take it amiss that the stream continues to

flow; they would gladly be recollected in prayer, but the price of detachment is too high a one for them to pay. Under such circumstances, can we wonder that their desire remains unfulfilled?

We have before remarked that desolations may be traced to three sources: to God, to man himself, and to the Evil One. If sent by God, they must be patiently endured; if they arise from the Evil One, they must be repelled; whilst if they spring from ourselves, they must be remedied.

The remedies to be employed are of two kinds: those which precede and those which accompany prayer. The first-named are many in number, and include, amongst others, recollection of spirit, purity of heart, mortification of the senses, victory over the passions, a love of solitude, detachment from all possessions, honours and created pleasures, interior silence, and the annihilation of earthly desires.

"It is strange indeed," says St. Gregory, "to see how we venture upon the path of contemplation before we have learnt the very ABC of mortification! We are filled with

self, and yet we desire to be filled with God. We neglect alike our bodies and our souls, never hesitating to gratify our senses in any way they may demand, feasting our eyes upon all that stimulates our curiosity, and listening to what, in the main, is mere vanity. Our days are passed in idle conversations, the life we live is exterior and unrecollected, and yet we conceive that a moment will suffice to calm and subdue our spirit. Such a thing is wholly impossible."

The maintenance of a true spirit of recollection demands from us vigilance and jealous ward over the affections of the heart; but because there are so few profoundly mortified souls amongst us, it comes to pass that, for the most part, we find ourselves in prayer like storm-tossed vessels on the ocean, driven hither and thither by the force of the gale. Yet, none the less, prayer must never be abandoned, since we stand in far greater need of its aid than those who have already made the quiet harbour and cast anchor there.

"But what can I do," you will ask, "to free myself from these importunate thoughts?"

In the first place, one must seek to realize the presence of God, and to bring this repeatedly home to the soul during prayer. Secondly, a great desire for communion with God must be conceived, leading us to empty our minds of all that might prove a source of distraction. The subject or truth to be considered must then be duly placed before us, in order that heart and mind alike may be concentrated upon it.

"I do all this," you reply, "and yet it seems worse than useless. I cannot constrain my mind to remain quietly in God's presence for five minutes at a time; it plays truant forthwith, and is recaptured only after much precious time has been lost. This constantly repeated experience makes me shrink from mental prayer, and leads me to conceive of it as an impossibility where my own soul is concerned."

This complaint is no uncommon one, and in order to apply the remedy we must seek for means whereby the attention of the mind may be secured and the heart's affections aroused during these periods of distractions, coldness, and aridity.

Appendix

SEVENTH INSTRUCTION

On the Second Way of Prayer.

The excellence of mental prayer lies, not in thinking much, but in loving much, and it may be stated as a general truth that its value is enhanced in greater degree by suffering than by action. There is a species of contemplation in which the soul suffers Divine things, for the quiet endurance in prayer of perpetual wandering thoughts, of a heart ever prone either to flinch or to despond, and of the pertinacious assaults of the Evil One, is no mean suffering. Such contemplation as this is far from what the soul would choose for itself, but it is, nevertheless, highly profitable, and productive of much glory to God.

Besides this definite practice of patience, there are other and excellent means which may enable us to make our time of prayer both sweet and fruitful, whenever it arises that the mind for various reasons finds it impossible to apply itself to the proposed subject of meditation. One such means, which we

have already indicated in a former instruction, consists in the union of mental and vocal prayer, as taught us by St. Ignatius in his "Spiritual Exercises," and is a form of devotion which St. Theresa tells us she was accustomed to use for many years. The Lord's Prayer, for instance, is slowly recited, a pause being made over each word or phrase, in order to give the soul time to ponder its spiritual significance, and to savour its inward sweetness.

Thus, after uttering the words "Our Father," pause for a moment, and dwell upon this Name which is so tender and so charged with Divine love towards us. Make an act of faith in God as your Father; consider on how many grounds you are privileged to esteem yourself as His child—by creation, preservation in life, redemption, and justification. Then say to your soul: "O my soul, if God is thy Father, whence comes it that thou failest in love and obedience towards Him? If God is thy Father, where is the hope which thou shouldst place in Him, and where is thy reliance upon Him to meet thy

every need? Thou hast God for thy Father, and thou believest it possible to perish of hunger! He shed His blood for thee, and thou fearest lest He should refuse thee even a morsel of bread! O my God and my Father, I hope in Thee. O best of Fathers, what an unworthy child Thou hast in me! How grieved I am to have offended and dishonoured Thee ever since I came into this world! My Father! I have sinned, and am not worthy to be called Thy child. Suffer me at least to come before Thee as Thy servant. I will never offend Thee again, and henceforth I will love Thee with my whole heart."

If this one word provides you with food sufficient for your meditation, there is no need to go further. When its sweetness has been well savoured, pass on to the next, "Who art in heaven," and consider how great and powerful God is, since He dwells in so beautiful a palace, and that, seeing that such an inheritance awaits you above, you must suffer gladly whatever detaches you from the things of this earth. Labour diligently in this evangelic field, and you will find it yield a treasure

of grace to enrich you, and the source of living water to quench your thirst.

After the *Pater noster*, the *Ave Maria*, the Creed, or some Psalm, may be recited in a similar way, or the Litany of the Holy Name, a pause being made over each title ascribed to the Son of God, in order that acts of faith, hope, love, contrition, and thanksgiving, may be made. Thus, when you have uttered the words, "Jesus, God of peace, have mercy on me," pause awhile, and reflect how Jesus is indeed the God of peace, and alone able to impart peace to your heart. "Why, then," you may ask, "dost thou seek peace, O my soul, in creatures? O God of peace, tranquillize my poor heart, which is so often troubled and disquieted. When shall I learn to seek repose in Thy Divine Heart, which is the true centre of my peace? O sweet Jesus, give me Thy peace, Thy love, and Thy benediction. Speak, and bid the waves be still. Allay this tempest which disturbs our repose, both Thine and mine. O my soul, love none but Jesus, since none but He can give thee peace and satisfy thy desires."

This method of prayer is abundantly fruitful for the soul, and may be employed after Holy Communion in order to stir the heart to devotion. Amidst so many gracious attributes as are ascribed in this Litany to the Divine Son of God, there cannot fail to be one which will awaken your heart's affections and meet the need of the moment. When you have found it, tarry there like a bee on a flower until all the hidden sweetness has been gathered in.

The words of the Sacred Scriptures, or some passages from the "Imitation of Jesus Christ," may also be read with reverence and attention. In them you will doubtless meet with something calculated to touch your heart and rouse it to devotion, whether during meditation or in your thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

EIGHTH INSTRUCTION

On Self-Examination as a Form of Meditation

Since the true end of all meditation is amendment of life, we must judge that method

to be the best for ourselves which implants in us deep detestation of our sins, and a great desire to forsake them. Prayer may be likened to an orange-tree, bearing leaves and flowers and fruit. Some there are who gather the leaves, others weave garlands of the flowers, but they are wisest who pluck the fruit and eat it with delight.

Now, the principal fruit of meditation consists in the knowledge of our faults, and a firm resolution to overcome them ; hence, to make a good examen is to make a good meditation.* St. Ignatius counsels those as yet unskilled in the practice of meditation, but who are desirous of amending their life, to examine themselves on the commandments of God and of the Church, pausing over each separately to consider what it enjoins, and how just it is and profitable to the soul, how reasonable and easy of fulfilment. Thereafter he bids them examine their consciences as to the manner in which these commandments have been kept, and, beholding their grievous neglect of them, to make acts of

* See Fourth Method, or First Way of Prayer.

contrition for the past and resolutions of amendment for the future.

The same kind of examen may be made in respect of the seven capital sins, considering their deadly effect upon the soul, and conceiving a great sorrow for having offended God in so grievous a manner. This method will often be found useful even by those habituated to mental prayer. When they experience dryness and desolation, let them turn to the consideration of their sins, especially of that one particular sin by which they are most frequently overcome, noting alike source and effects, seeking to stir their hearts to a true detestation of them, and to take counsel with themselves as to the best remedies to be employed. If they rise up steadfastly resolved to co-operate with the grace of God in the work of their soul's healing, they may rest assured that their meditation has been no unfruitful one.

There are others, again, who derive much profit and consolation from reflecting upon the graces which God has imparted to them, and the dangers from which it has pleased

Him to deliver them. Souls well advanced on the path of mental prayer may use such considerations as these to stimulate their hearts to the love of God and to sorrow for sin, contrasting the countless benefits received from Him with their own cowardice, disloyalty, faithlessness, and ingratitude, wherein they will not fail to find ample material for half an hour's meditation.

NINTH INSTRUCTION

Remedies against Temptations in Times of Darkness

There are times when the soul finds itself wholly disconsolate. Harassed and afflicted, it seems, as Job says, suspended between heaven and earth, devoid of the consolations of either. St. Bernard, who himself passed through such an experience, has left us a vivid picture of his sufferings which is calculated to bring comfort to hearts undergoing the like spiritual trial.

What makes matters worse is that temptations are apt to be so violent during these

times of darkness as to render the soul unable to determine whether or not it has consented to them, and the uncertainty gives rise to sharp anguish. "I would endure without complaint," so it laments itself, "were I but sure that I withhold consent; but I seem to myself actually to utter those evil thoughts which assail my mind, and to acquiesce in the unholy desires I experience."

The remedy for such a condition is twofold. In the first place, the soul must be prepared to submit its own judgment to that of its director, being content to be solicitous only where he sees cause for fear, and to dismiss those scruples and anxieties which he treats lightly. Submission and obedience alone afford us sure foothold in the matter of our soul's salvation.

The second means is the use of some external sign whereby to prove to yourself that your will remains true to God. Thus, some persons, finding themselves exposed to violent temptations, and unable to make any definite acts whatever during prayer, take a crucifix in their hands, and say: "My God!

I affirm in the sight of heaven and earth that I desire to adore Thee each time I kiss this crucifix, and to make an act of love to Thee each time that I press it to my heart. ✝ As often as I bow my head, or strike my breast, or lift my eyes to heaven, I make in intention an act of humility, of contrition, and of conformity to Thy will. Every utterance of the holy Name of Jesus shall be a protest against the suggestions of the Evil One, and a token of my abhorrence of all that displeases Thee."

God has no need of these exterior signs to understand the language of our hearts, since He knows, without our telling Him, all that we desire or shrink from ; but such a method may serve to reassure timid souls, and to restore them to tranquillity. The movements of the body are in response to the exercise of the will, and hence these exterior acts necessarily proceed from the heart, even though the latter seem incapable of producing them at the moment. Since God is graciously pleased to accept our good desires, you will not lack the merit of those acts you were

inwardly willing to make, nor fail to turn your time of prayer into a time of blessing.

Some souls, again, take refuge in the following method of meditation: Unable to pray, they yet find access to God by means of their desires; and seeing themselves distracted, yet without power to concentrate their thoughts, cold and dry, yet unable to kindle the flame or bring forth the fruit of love in their heart, they lift their spirit heavenward, and say: "My God! how gladly would I do more for Thee if I could. Oh, how fain I am to love Thee with my whole heart, and to praise and glorify Thee as do the Saints in Paradise! Would that I could pray as so many good religious are praying before Thee at this very moment! My God! I am not worthy to sit at meat with them, but suffer me at least to gather the crumbs which fall from their table. Could I but bring with me their fervour and devotion when I come before Thee! In default of my own, I present to Thee their prayers, and those which Thy well-beloved Son offered up when on earth."

A meditation such as this is truly excellent

and full of merit, as was that made by the good peasant who accompanied St. Ignatius and his companions on their journey. Seeing them fall on their knees to pray when they arrived at an inn, he knelt down with them, and said, " My God ! I desire to do as these Saints do, and to pray as they pray," and thereby, in reward of his humility, obtained from God a great gift of prayer.

TENTH INSTRUCTION

The Prayer of Resignation

You will tell me, no doubt, that such desires as these are but transitory, and that you will be at a loss how to profit by the remainder of the time set apart for prayer. There is no need, however, for fears on this score. Means will not be lacking to occupy the heart in a way well pleasing to God.

Do what the Son of God did in the Garden of Olives when He passed whole hours in repeating the selfsame words : " My Father, may Thy will, not Mine, be done." You may well be content to re-echo a prayer

worthy of God Himself, and consecrated by His heart and lips, nor can a more perfect prayer of union be conceived or uttered by us.

Recall to mind whatever may be a source of affliction to you at the moment, and say to God with profound reverence : " My Lord ! here is a chalice of desolation and weariness of spirit which is very bitter to me. I pray Thee, if it be possible, remove it from me ; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done."

" My God ! a chalice of grief and sore trouble of mind is set before me, the very sight of which is a source of anguish to me. Dispense me, I pray Thee, from drinking it ; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done."

" My Father and my God ! a severe illness hangs over me, and my weak frame shrinks back in horror. If it be possible, let this chalice pass from my lips ; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done."

Review in this way all that is or may prove to be a source of mortification to you, conforming your will to the holy will of God,

notwithstanding the inward repugnance of the natural man. No more profitable method of prayer is open to you than this.

ELEVENTH INSTRUCTION

On the Adoration of the Divine Perfections and the Spirit's Pilgrimage in Company with Jesus

If you cannot hold converse with God Himself, you can at least call upon His whole creation to praise and bless Him with you. No distractions need be feared in the fulfilment of an office of devotion which has found expression in many of our most beautiful hymns.

Thus, you may exclaim : " Let all the works of the Lord praise, bless, and glorify Him ! Angels of Paradise, bless and praise our God ! Sing the praises of your Lord, O mortal men, and love Him with your whole heart !"

Traverse the wide universe in spirit, calling alike upon His animate and inanimate creation to bless God, as did the three children in the furnace of fire at Babylon. Bear your

own share in this hymn of love, and praise your God, as best you may, by bringing Him a patient and a humbled spirit. Extol all His infinite perfections—His goodness and beauty, His wisdom and power, mercy and justice, His sweetness and patience, His greatness and His majesty, His boundless liberality and His magnificence—and as you utter these Divine attributes adore them one by one, and offer the sacrifice of praise on the altar of your heart, saying to God: "O my God, how amiable Thou art, how beautiful and how good!" Ponder well all that these words imply. "How great and how powerful! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy Name. It is He Who forgiveth all thy iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases, Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, Who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion, Who reneweth thy youth like the eagle's when thy strength faileth thee."

In this way you may recount all the varied perfections of God, pausing for awhile over those which make special appeal to your heart's devotion. But the prayer which is

at once the most beautiful and charged with the deepest consolation for the cast-down and afflicted soul is to make pilgrimage in spirit to the holy places associated with the earthly life of Jesus Christ, and to offer Him thanks for all the sufferings He endured for the love of us.

Find your way into the stable at Bethlehem, and adore Him in company with the shepherds; stand amazed at His humility, surrender yourself to His gentleness, hope in His goodness. Stay beside the crib, and if no devout thought springs to your mind, remember that the dumb beasts brought Him what worship they could. Sing the beautiful song the Angels sang; give glory to God, and ask Him to pour His own peace into your heart.

From the mystery of the Nativity pass on to the adoration of the Kings. Go up to the Temple with the Blessed Virgin, and present her Son to God. Flee with Him into Egypt, dwell with Him in the humble Nazareth home, and witness His life there. Follow Him as He goes out to the desert, as He teaches in Judea, walks upon the waters, brings healing

to the sick and life to the dead. But, above all, follow Him along the way of the Cross, from the Garden of Olives to the Mount of Calvary. Thank Him for the sufferings He endured for your sake; listen to the reproach uttered to His sleeping disciples: "Have ye no consolation for Me? Can ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." What balm, O my God, lies hidden for the afflicted soul in the contemplation of these mysteries of Divine suffering!

TWELFTH INSTRUCTION

Acts and Aspirations of Love

How excellent a thing is the science of the love of God! Meditation may be impossible to many souls, but is there one that cannot breathe forth a sigh? Sighs are the language of love, and may be truly termed the most beautiful, most potent, and most eloquent of all prayers. Thus those souls pray whom the love of God has vanquished, and whose one desire is to be united to Him. Speech forsakes them; nothing is left to them but

sighs. "Daughters of Jerusalem," they say in the midst of their spiritual pangs, "stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples, because I languish with love;" and thereafter they fall silent, and the heart alone is eloquent, sighing with every breath, and breathing only to sigh.

This method of prayer, it is true, is specially adapted for those souls which find themselves unable any longer to meditate, but are, so to speak, within reach at length of the union they so ardently desire; but it will, none the less, prove helpful in some degree to all, whether during meditation or at its close. Its designation of ejaculatory prayer indicates that the words uttered are as arrows freighted with love which the human heart lets fly that they may find their way into the very heart of God Himself.

Prayer such as this lacks all form and method, and love is its only teacher. The heart must be subjected to no restraint, but left free to say what it will to God. "He who loves not," says St. Bernard, "finds the language of love but a barbarous tongue; but

in the court of heaven above, where Charity is crowned King, none other is ever heard."

Spontaneous acts of love are always the most welcome, but this need not preclude us from making certain definite ones in prayer according as our need may dictate. They are greatly to be relied on when the soul is passing through a period of aridity, tormented by distractions, and unable to find repose in anything. At such a time it must seek its occupation in loving. Brief aspirations are all that is needed, especially when they spring from a soul on fire with love :

" O my God ! my All ! when wilt Thou be wholly mine ? When shall I be wholly Thine ?"

" O God of my soul ! what bliss is mine in that I belong to Thee ! O my Glory and my Life ! why can I not love Thee as Thou meritest to be loved ?"

" Daughters of Jerusalem, tell my Beloved that I languish with love."

" My God ! my God ! why hast Thou forsaken me ? Alas ! I have no right to ask. My sins have truly merited that Thou shouldst abandon me."

"My heart is ready, my God, my heart is ready for whatever Thou mayest send. Not my will, but Thine, be done!"

"O sweet Jesus, look on me with Thine eyes of compassion and bless me."

"O Supreme Love, give me Thy holy love."

"Is it conceivable that I should have grieved Thee, O God of my heart and Father of my life?"

"When shall I know what it is to love Thee, to lay hold on Thee, to possess Thee?"

An infinitude of such aspirations may be uttered according as the soul is prompted at the moment, and will prove none the less acceptable to God even though our own hearts seem to us wholly lacking in the fervour of devotion.

THIRTEENTH INSTRUCTION

Acts of Faith, Hope, Love and Thanksgiving

It is well to reiterate that the end of meditation is not meditation itself, but love. The affections of the heart are of far higher

intrinsic value than any activities of our reasoning faculty, since they tend to detach us from created things and to unite us to God. Where love is there is always merit, but this latter is not invariably or of necessity associated with the practice of mental prayer, which in itself is but a means to the arousing of the affections. Given the achievement of the end, the means are superfluous, and I dispense you from meditation if you can truly love. To some souls who have long combated their passions, who are fully persuaded of the great truths of religion, and are far advanced along the road to perfection, nothing seems to be left save to desire and to sigh until such time as they reach the consummation of their sighs and their desires in the possession of the Beloved. The waiting is only for a moment. How brief, and yet how slow to pass !

Deeply taught souls stand in need of no set words in which to express their love. Their affections are spontaneous, springing from a heart which lies open to the Divine inspirations. Such, however, as are but at

the beginning, and to whom meditation presents great difficulty, may use with advantage the acts of faith, hope, love, etc., which are to be found in books of devotion, and of which we append certain examples, leaving it to the individual soul to expand them in accordance with the Holy Spirit's teaching.

AN ACT OF FAITH.

"My God! I believe that Thou art my Father, my Creator and my Redeemer, my Master and my Shepherd, my Protector and my Spouse. I believe that Thou art supremely wise and supremely good, all-powerful and infinitely to be loved. I believe that the course of this world is guided by Thy wisdom; that Thy Providence ordains or permits all that comes to pass; that Thou thinkest upon me, watchest over me, and lovest me with Divine charity, better and more truly than I love myself. All that Thou doest, O my God, is for my good, and for my greater sanctification. I believe in Thee as my Life, my Supreme Good, my Glory and my Con-

solation, my Peace and the Source of all my bliss."

AN ACT OF HOPE.

"O my God! by Thy infinite mercy and the merits of Thy well-beloved Son, I hope to obtain entrance into Thy Paradise, the forgiveness of my sins, and the assistance of Thy grace, trusting that, whether in life or death, Thou wilt never abandon me. I look to Thee to deliver me from this temptation which assails me now, to give me those virtues of which I stand in need, to lift me up out of my misery, to enable me to carry the cross which presses so heavily on me, and to overcome this particular obstacle which prevents my serving Thee as I ought."

ACTS OF ADORATION.

"O Almighty God! O my Lord and my Sovereign Master! I adore Thee with boundless reverence; I acknowledge Thee as my King and my God, upon Whom I depend for my very being, and without Whom I could

not continue in existence for a single moment. O ye Angels of Heaven ! offer your adoration to God on my behalf, come and adore Him with me. O all ye dwellers upon earth ! come and prostrate yourselves before the Lord, for it is He Who made us, Who keeps us in life, Who nourishes and fortifies and quickens us."

" O Sacred Humanity of my Saviour ! I bless Thee and adore Thee. O immaculate Soul ! O pure Flesh ! O Precious Blood ! O Heart of Hearts ! O Love beyond all love ! O Temple of grace ! O Sanctuary of the Divinity ! I bless You and adore You. O Sacred Wounds ! imprint yourselves upon my heart. O great channels of Divine grace ! I kiss you and adore you, and in you I set all my hope."

ACTS OF CHARITY.

" O my God ! it is indeed joy to be called to Thy service, and to own Thee as my Master. How my heart rejoices over Thy wisdom, goodness, and beauty, Thy power,

Thy generosity, and Thy loveliness! Truly I am well satisfied to be subject to Thee, and to know no other Master!"

"I love Thee, my God; I love Thee with my whole heart. Thou knowest this, since my heart lies open to Thee. Oh, how greatly I desire to love Thee and to belong to Thee without reserve!"

"O Goodness, ever ancient and yet ever new! too soon did I learn to grieve Thee, too late have I loved Thee!"

"Could I but make Thee known to all Thy creatures and loved by them! Were but the hearts of men and Angels alike united in my one poor heart, that I might offer Thee a love more worthy of Thee! Behold, O my God and my Saviour! I lay before Thee this heart of mine. Keep it Thyself, I pray Thee, and sanctify it."

"I renounce all terrestrial affections, and will keep Thy commandments faithfully. My heart is steadfastly purposed to love Thee, my God and my Strength, my Refuge and my Protection, my Consolation and my Life."

If your heart overflows with love and

desire for communion with God, suffer it to pour itself out before Him, choosing alike its own words and its own way.

ACTS OF OBLATION.

After making your acts of love, offer to God all that you have and possess.

"I offer Thee my understanding, O my God! submitting it to the faith of Holy Church and the dispositions of Thy Providence. I offer Thee my heart unreservedly, with all its anxieties and its desires. I offer Thee my soul, with all its powers, my body, my health, my strength, and my life, that Thou mayest dispose of them as seems best to Thee. I bring Thee my possessions and my wealth, my honour and my reputation, my friends, and whatever I hold most dear."

"My heart is ready, my God, my heart is ready—ready to be exalted or to be abased, to accept of prosperity or adversity, to do all and to endure all, to live or to die; ready for everything Thy will ordains, whether in time or in eternity."

Appendix

ACTS OF THANKSGIVING.

These acts come naturally to the devout soul, and may well suffice to occupy it during the time of meditation. Recount all those general and particular mercies which God has bestowed upon you, thanking Him for each one in turn. Render thanks to Him for all His graces to the Blessed Virgin, to the Saints in Paradise, to His Church triumphant, and His Church militant and suffering, summoning all creation to join you in your thanksgiving. Considerations such as these are assuredly sufficient to furnish you with abundant matter.

ACTS OF CONTRITION.

How consoling it would be if, when you cannot pray, you could at least weep! Cassia is sweet, and myrrh is bitter. Teach yourself to find nourishment in myrrh when all sweetness fails. Prepare a banquet for your soul, as David did, spreading your sins before it, giving it to drink of its own iniquities and

ingratitude, and feeding it with tears. Say to God from the very ground of your heart:

"O my God, what have I done? What sins have I committed? What malady has taken hold on my soul? Canst Thou have sent me into the world for this, that I should offend against Thee? Is this the service for which Thou didst look, or the thanks I owe Thee for all Thy goodness towards me?"

"O disloyal and unthankful heart, capable of offending a God Who has been so good to thee, and loved thee from all eternity! So good a God, and so infinitely worthy of thy love—a God Who gave up His life for thee, Who became poor to enrich thee, and endured misery to give thee bliss! Oh! who will cause a fountain of tears to flow from my eyes? Who will teach me to weep day and night over my iniquities?"

"How couldst Thou have borne, O my Saviour and Redeemer, to ascend Thy Cross for such as I, and to give Thy life for me, whose sins have made Thee die, not one, but a hundred deaths? Alas! Thou hast shed

all Thy blood for me, and I have no single tear to shed for Thee!"

"Ungrateful wretch that I am, can I live thus any longer? I abhor my past treachery and infidelity. O God of compassions! accord Thy forgiveness to Thy unworthy servant. By the help of Thy grace, I purpose to live henceforward a better life, and never again to offend Thee, but to keep Thy commandments inviolate. This I promise, and I will not break my word to Thee."

Besides asking pardon for your own sins, you may bewail those which are committed daily throughout the whole world against the Divine Majesty. Desire sorrow at least, even if you have it not, and strike your hand over your hard and evil heart as a sign that you grieve over your sins, whether sensibly or by a definite act of the will. Humble yourself if you can neither pray nor weep, remembering how David tells us that no contrite or humbled heart is ever despised by God.

ACTS OF CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD.

The most admirable and fruitful acts which the soul can make in affliction are those of conformity to the will of God. Of these we have given certain examples in preceding instructions.

Set before your mind all that is calculated to cause you suffering. Make, so to speak, the round of your crosses, and kneeling before each in turn, embrace it, stretch out your arms to be nailed to it, and say with St. Andrew: "O sweet Cross, sanctified by the death of my Master, I adore thee and bid thee welcome. I kiss thee and embrace thee. Receive me into thy arms, and hold me to thee so closely that nothing may ever avail to separate me from thee."

PETITION.

No soul truly alive to its own misery needs to be taught this method of prayer. All that is required is that you should consider your necessities and present them before the throne

of God, asking Him for what you lack, and invoking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. Seeing that your miseries are innumerable, you will find no dearth of material for prayer once you begin to bring them before your God.

FOURTEENTH INSTRUCTION

The Prayer of Humility

Although the methods of prayer indicated in the preceding chapters are calculated to fix the attention of the most wandering mind, and to light up the flame of love in the most callous heart, there are, nevertheless, times when the soul finds itself wholly unable to think of or to hold converse with God, so great is its interior-aversion from every form of spiritual exercise. My final counsel to a soul in such dispositions is to make an exercise of humility and patience.

The prayer of the humble is so potent with God that He may be truly held as unable to withstand it. Achab was an evil king, but no sooner had he humbled himself than God

was, so to speak, constrained to mercy, declaring to the prophet who called upon Him to avenge Himself that vengeance was impossible in face of the king's self-abasement. Patience, linked to humility, knows how to appease all wrath and avert all scourges, how to obtain every grace, to ward off all condemnation, and to draw down the abundance of heavenly aid and consolations.

Oh, what a cry mounts up to heaven from the humble, patient soul! What victorious battle it wages with the goodness and mercy of God! "Blessed," says St. Paul, "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, Who comforteth us in all our tribulation." "Note the wide scope of the Apostle's words," remarks St. Bernard. "God is a God, not of a few, but of many mercies; not of some, but of all consolation. He consoles us, not in certain of our tribulations only, but in all, for His is a fulness of goodness, charity, and mercy which asks but for room to pour itself out like a flood."

Now, upon whom, out of all men, do the eyes of God rest in mercy? Upon the humble in heart and spirit, who deems himself unworthy of consolation, and well paid for all his labour if he be but suffered to remain in His presence.

The streams of sweetness and Divine consolations flow, so St. Augustine reminds us, not on the mountains, but in the valleys. The work of patience is a perfect, finished work, and the soul in which it is wrought out, as St. James teaches, is itself perfected thereby.

If, in our meditation, we desire to bring glory to God, there are no means readier to our hand than humble patience and patient humility. If we seek to increase our merit in His sight, patience and humility are, again, the only road by which our feet must travel. If we set ourselves to aim at holy perfection, there is no other groundwork for this edifice than humility, and no coping-stone save patience. We may not always find ourselves able to pray easily, and may lack both words to speak and tears to shed, but it is always

open to us to humble ourselves. We may be deprived of consolations, but who or what is there that can deprive us of patience ?

Humble yourself, then, Christian soul—humble yourself in the midst of your coldness and aridity, your distractions and sufferings, and acknowledge that you are powerless apart from the grace of God, wholly ignorant, weak, and evil. But merely to confess this is not enough ; you must go on to own that you have indeed deserved chastisement at His hands, taking heed not to murmur or complain as though that chastisement were unduly heavy. Reflect upon the condemnation which your sins have merited, and ask yourself whether your present sufferings be not light in comparison. After all, what is Paradise but the presence of God ? The Saints in heaven enjoy Him in bliss ; your lot here on earth is to enjoy Him in the midst of suffering. In a sense, your lot is the better ; it is at least enriched with the greater merit.

Beware of spiritual sloth, but rest assured that you are not inactive so long as distrac-

tions are involuntary ; that to suffer much is to do much ; that patience in prayer far outweighs consolation in prayer ; and that, if only you do what you can, God will give you what you desire.

Great graces are the outcome of great conflicts, and abundant consolations are accorded where temptations have been fiercest. For sixteen years St. Theresa offered up her sacrifice of patience in prayer, thereby meriting in the end the high gift which God bestowed upon her, both of prayer and of intimate union with Himself. To have failed in courage and forsaken prayer would have been to forego this wonderful and priceless grace.

" But," you will urge, " God has forsaken me now for so long." It seems to you that you are like one of those mountains of Gilboe, smitten with His curse, and on which neither dew nor rain can fall. You conceive of God as being angry with you, but you are wholly mistaken. Through this very desert, barren and desolate though it be, lies your road to the Promised Land, where milk and honey

flow in abundance. He is grounding you in humility that He may fit you to receive the high graces He designs to bestow upon you. He who empties will surely fill you, and will enable you first to merit that which He is waiting to give you. Everything hinges upon your fidelity to prayer, however difficult this may be. If the Evil One asks you mockingly what you are doing there, reply that you are doing the will of your God, and guarding the fortress of your soul, as He has bidden you; that He does you honour enough if He admits you to His presence, and that, even though you can do nothing, you are ready to learn how to suffer. Happy indeed is that soul which can say truly, before death comes to meet it: "However many the duties that crowded in upon me, I have never allowed myself to renounce meditation." Even in this life such a soul will surely set foot in the Promised Land.

There are some who claim that they leave God only that they may serve Him, forsaking prayer in order that they may preach, or hear confessions, or visit the sick and the poor.

Alas ! there is reason to fear that in leaving God they go to seek themselves. He who would preach well must first meditate well ; he who would teach must first learn ; and he who would draw souls to God must himself first be united to Him. Can souls be saved apart from the grace of God, and does not this grace flow down to us through His appointed channel of prayer ? We often hear the plea of impotence put forward, but in truth it is faith, charity, and trust that are lacking. To do as God bids us, and to unite ourselves to Him in prayer, is not to tempt Him. Rather do we tempt Him when we venture to promise ourselves His aid even though prayer be abandoned. This is to go into battle unarmed, to seek to sustain life without nourishment, or to walk with no ray of light to guide us. Are we not justified in fearing that such souls, professedly so zealous for God's glory, are but too much concerned for their own, preferring rather to forego prayer than to risk the loss of their reputation amongst their fellow-men ?

O my God ! nothing is ever lost by serving

Thee, nor dost Thou fail to honour in royal fashion those who honour Thee. Let me recall the words of a servant of Thine who said that he would sooner lose his reputation than abandon meditation, and was more solicitous to pray well than to preach well.

Be faithful, then, devout soul, to the due performance of your spiritual exercises, notwithstanding the difficulties and inward repugnance you experience, and how many soever may be the pressing claims upon your time. If you fail momentarily, do not lose courage, but make good your fault by your patience. God's justice is to be exalted no less than the rest of His infinite perfections, and since His justice alone withstands the flowing of the great stream of His compassions, once its claims are met, His mercy has free course. We satisfy its claims by our humility and our patience. Here are the victims to be laid in sacrifice upon His altar, and although we may seem to ourselves at the moment to have lost all, our gain is none the less great and abiding.

Finally, I would bid you remember that

where nature is most barren, there grace may reap her richest harvests; that the Divine operations are never purer than when they are least apparent to the senses; that you are never so near to your God as when you believe yourself to be exiled from His presence; and that, provided only you remain faithful in this purgatory of desolation, He will lead you, even in this present life, into the Paradise of consolation, there to sing His praises, and to exclaim with the wise Son of Sirach: "Behold with your eyes how I have laboured a little, and have found much rest to myself." Amen.

THE END

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